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THE LIFE AND WORK

OF

AUGUSTE RODIN

BY

FREDERICK LAWTON, M.A.

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

153-157, FIFTH AVENUE

1907

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*Photo]*

*[Crevaux*

PORTRAIT OF RODIN

*Painted by Jacques Blanche*

*To face page v*

## Author's Preface

A SUFFICIENT apology for the following book exists in the unique position occupied by Auguste Rodin to-day, not only among the sculptors of his own country, but in other lands on both sides of the Atlantic. Without attempting to establish any exact and definite precedence for his achievement over that of all others, it may be safely asserted that his name will rank in the future among the foremost of the great masters of the statuary art. Eminence in foreigners England has always been quick to recognise, and Rodin's election to the Presidency of the International Society of Sculptors, Painters, and Gravers, in the place of Whistler, did no more than give an official character to the esteem in which he has long been held in our country.

To write a life of Rodin, in the usual acceptation of the word, is almost an impossibility. The record is rather that of an immense labour in which all else has been merged. Indeed, to such an extent intellectually has he lived in his art and for his art that, whereas other men's memories are filled with anecdotes of the past that enable the hearer to reconstruct whole periods of personal history, Rodin's reminiscences seldom arouse but to the touch of some chord connected with his work, or, if they are awaked by accident, he regards them with indifference. Indeed, when speaking of himself, as he is forced to do in relating the creation of his pieces of sculpture and the struggles that have been waged round them, there is an absence of egoism and a curious identification of his personality with his productions that are very remarkable. Still, on the

## Author's Preface

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biographical side, there is a story which can be told, a continuity which can be illustrated with some detail ; but the salient points are those of character, and the dominant note is the steady progress of a poor, unfriended boy, through long effort and self-denial, to a position which he regards less as a worldly success than as an opportunity to proclaim his ideal.

The author's obligations are due mainly to Monsieur Rodin himself, from whose conversations he has obtained much of what is hereafter set down, and who has kindly placed at his disposal letters and documents giving information at first hand. Use has also been made of Léon Maillard's fine study of the sculptor's masterpieces, of Mdlle. Judith Cladel's interesting sketch, entitled "*Auguste Rodin pris sur la Vie*," and of a number of articles published in various French reviews and magazines by such critics as Roger Marx and Camille Mauclair. The former of these two has been, for the last twenty years and more, an appreciative student of his great fellow-countryman, whose genius he was one of the earliest in France to defend and explain.

Summed up, Rodin's career may be said to furnish a putting into practice of Victor Hugo's advice : "*Ami, cache ta vie et répands tes œuvres.*"<sup>1</sup> His life has been modest, simple, and, except for a few friends' society, retired, even solitary ; his work has been an ever wider-reaching diffusion of plastic forms of beauty that now radiate, and will continue to radiate, among men.

<sup>1</sup> "Friend, hide thy life and diffuse thy works."

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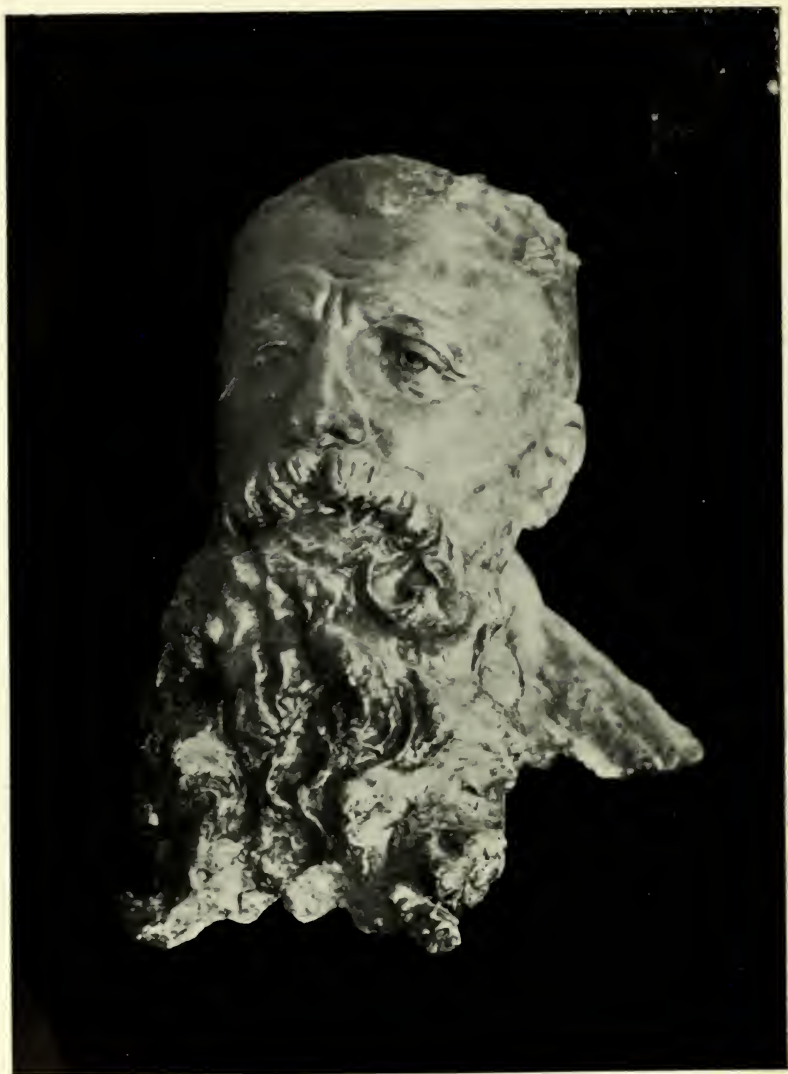


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BUST OF RODIN

*By Jules Desbois (see page 64)*

*To face page 1*

# The Life of Rodin

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

IN setting out to speak of a sculptor whose hand has been perforce against most of his brethren and that of most of his brethren against him, a few preliminary words touching on Renascence and contemporary sculpture are called for, to explain what has been protested against and what is the nature of the protest. A more detailed account of the characteristic features of Rodin's art will be reserved for later chapters. The hostility of sculptors of the orthodox style or styles has been throughout, and is still, only too patent; and, if Rodin's position during the last few years as Vice-President of the "Société Nationale des Beaux Arts"<sup>1</sup> has enabled him to give more weighty utterance to his own convictions, these are none the less considered by the majority of French statuary as rank heterodoxy. The "master's" own account of the matter is to the point.

"They will not understand my realism," he says, referring to his opponents. "For them sculpture should not endeavour to represent flesh and blood and bone, since marble and bronze do not possess the colours which in painting create the illusion of life. I, on the contrary, claim that the sculptor can reach the same result if he

<sup>1</sup> National Society of Fine Arts.

# The Life of Rodin

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✓ will reproduce with fidelity and intensity the model he has before him. It is with his eyes fixed on life that he must work ; and his art will be able to represent it entire, when he has observed sufficiently and has sufficiently trained his fingers."

A like effort and a like artistic faith have nothing revolutionary about them in France. As Roger Marx, in one of his critical essays on Rodin, remarks: "Always and above all, Rodin is an artist of pure French tradition. Such a statement may puzzle at first, because those who are supposed to embody tradition practise a rigid art quite different from that of Rodin ; but, if one reflects and recalls the past, it will be easy to acquire the certainty that from the Gothic sculptors to Jean Goujon, from Germain Pilon to Puget, from Houdon to Rude, sculpture in France has had little of the tranquil about it, to quote the expression of Philippe de Chennevières ; and the truly great French sculptors have never feared to be expressive, to seem tormented."

There are proofs in abundance of what Monsieur Marx advances. First, we have Rodin's unreserved admiration for those Gothic carvers of stone, great notwithstanding Cicognara's neglect of their merits, who cared more for the beauty of what they wrought than for the perpetuation of their name, and whose handiwork is the glory of many an old cathedral. In Rodin's work, as in theirs, we find form subservient to the idea and obeying it, yet gaining by the relation. This characteristic is intuitional in him, as doubtless in them, not an imitation of some preceding school. The bond of union between his present and their past is a real spiritual affinity.

So too for the masters of the Renaissance period Rodin has a sincere worship. To say that his art and theirs are exactly similar would be to deprive the modern Michael Angelo of his peculiar praise, seeing that he has added to sculpture a new perfection. But it needs only to compare



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his "Baiser," for instance, with Jean Goujon's "Diana" or Puget's "Milo of Croton" in order to find the same admirable leading of curved lines in such a way that the light ripples over the marble and kisses it into living form. In this intimate comprehension of the effects of light and shadow Rodin goes back farther than French tradition; he is at one with the ancient Greeks, whom he is never tired of exalting. "For me," he says, "the Greeks are our masters. No one ever executed sculpture as they did. They knew how to make the blood flow in the veins of their statues. In comparison with this essential thing the subject is nothing."

The quarrel between Rodin and the orthodox sculpture of his time is not difficult to state. The latter restricts subject and pose to certain categories that are considered noble, and judges all others by the norm thus supplied. Rodin, on the other hand, holds that subject and pose are capable of being infinitely varied, and one of his pre-occupations is to seek continually a fresh revelation. In part, the quarrel is one that has raged from time to time in other domains of art, and will probably continue to break out periodically as long as original talents are born and become strong enough to lead the way to some higher attainment.

It is one thing to do as the ancients did; it is another to copy what they did. The former method implies a study of nature in her thousand moods, and yields an enlarged horizon; the latter tends to narrow the horizon by evolving rules and imposing them, without regard to the changed conditions of living in the course of centuries. In sculpture, perhaps more than in any other art, the influence of classicism has made itself felt. It is responsible for several French styles that have run parallel to the saner national tradition. Some of them reached a relative excellence, notably the neo-Greek, in the hands of certain masters. But it is responsible also for a sort of

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artistic intolerance tending to oppose and condemn all that is not contained within its formula. This dogmatism hardly existed as a force in sculpture before the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth, those who exercised the art endeavoured on the whole to be natural; and, if their morbidezza of modelling was often excessive, they none the less succeeded, especially in the smaller productions, in putting a wonderful variety and grace of movement into their statuary. Houdon's "Ecorché"<sup>1</sup> and Pigalle's "Mercury" are good examples of what was thus accomplished.

It is possible that, with the advent of the First Empire, sculpture, as well as literature and painting, suffered from the Emperor's interference; but the real cause of the stiffness and insipidity in the works of Milhomme, Delaistre, Deseine, Moitte and others, was the failure to make their representation of life the expression of their own experience. A first reaction against the falseness of this Empire and early Restoration style set in after 1820, under the endeavours of Dupaty, Cortot, David d'Angers, Rude, and Pradier.

The greatest and sincerest of these reformers was Rude. His life offers some analogy to that of Rodin. Born of poor parents—his father was a pot-maker—he reached greatness by his native talent and singleness of purpose. After a twelve years' absence from France, spent in Belgium, whose capital possesses some of his work, he returned to Paris between 1820 and 1830, and began a series of sculptures which ended only with his death. His "Départ des Volontaires,"<sup>2</sup> on the Arc de Triomphe facing the Champs Elysées, is the finest piece of carving in that edifice; the Louvre and the churches of the Madeleine and St Vincent de Paul also contain fine specimens of his power. If the example of genius were

<sup>1</sup> Figure showing the muscles, the skin being absent.

<sup>2</sup> Departure of the Volunteers.







RAPID DRAWING FROM LIFE  
(see Chapter VII.)

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sufficient to counterbalance and correct false tendencies in the crowd, then Rude's work should have taught the sculptors of his age much. Unfortunately, neither he nor the other would-be reformers were able to prevail against the increasing dogmatism of the official style; and, under the Second Empire, academic statuary became as artificial as that of the First. Pradier's execution grew less sincere, and, like that of Marochetti and Clésinger, aimed more at polish, which, says Ruskin, is often attained at the expense of thought. The death of Rude in 1855 and of David d'Angers in 1856 left Barye, the animal sculptor, almost alone to carry on the sounder national tradition. There was one other older contemporary of Rodin, Carpeaux, born in 1827, who may be said to have disdained the facile smoothness and mechanical construction so commonly accepted in lieu of the more difficult perfection. His "Ugolino" in the Tuileries, his four allegorical figures supporting the Globe, and his group "La Danse,"<sup>1</sup> on the façade of the Opera, are original creations, with a freshness and vigour of execution that make us regret his short thread of existence. He died in 1875, in the same year as Barye.

On first thought, it may seem strange that nineteenth-century sculpture was so little stirred by the Romantic revival. Painting was strongly affected by it, and that in two successive movements, the former represented by Delacroix and his fellows, the latter by a host of landscape painters, Rousseau, Français, Daubigny, etc. The reason lies mostly in the narrower limits occupied by the statuary art, which render escape from a dominant style less possible, the authority the style exercises within this domain being all the more effectual. Such outside influence as sculpture can receive has generally come through its sister art. Indeed, many sculptors being also painters, it is natural that this should be so. The Luxem-

<sup>1</sup> The Dance.

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bourg contains productions of brush and chisel by Carrier-Belleuse, Daumier, Falguière, Gérôme. Rodin himself is an artist-draughtsman of rare talent. That the influence can be reciprocal appears plainly in the paintings of one of Rodin's old friends,<sup>1</sup> Eugène Carrière, who may be called the French Whistler. In the sculptor's sitting-room at Meudon is a picture presented to him by Carrière, which is strikingly sculptural both in colour and outline. Opposite, hangs a photograph of the three figures that crown Rodin's "Porte de l'Enfer." The comparison is instructive. One could imagine that both were by the same man. There are many other pictures of the artist that have the same character; they have been called bas-reliefs bathed in shadow, transcriptions in grey tones of Rodin's carving. On the other hand, there is a good deal of the vague suavity and mist of the painter's former pictures in the more recent creations of the sculptor.

One survival of art-classicism which makes itself felt to-day, and is still far from being discredited, in both painting and statuary, is the theory of the Academic nude. The Academic nude is a fixed type of nude construction, each limb and member of the body being supposed to have an exact, measured proportion to each other and the whole, outside of which all is deemed abnormal, false, and condemnable. With such a rigid system, it is evident that the student's technique becomes a mere mechanical business, and that whatever originality he may possess will be destroyed. Moreover, the living model is useless, if no deviations from the type are allowed; a wax dummy, with all its dimensions calculated and fashioned to the fraction of an inch, would be the best object of study.

This system has been defended by an appeal to the Greeks in oblivion of the fact that Greek statues are by no means all conformable to any one set of measurements.

<sup>1</sup> Died 1906.

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If such a uniformity exists anywhere in ancient sculpture, it will be rather in Roman statuary, the heavy immobility of which is the antithesis of Greek life and movement. Part of the perfection in a Greek statue depends on the possibility of rendering its peculiar force and beauty by more than one combination of forms ; and, in all Greek masterpieces representing the human body, there is an appreciable deviation of the nude figure not only from a set type but from the real individual. Says Monsieur Camille Mauclair : " The idea of the androgynous haunted the Greeks too much for them not to have tried in most of their masculine effigies to mingle the characters of the two sexes, even to almost straining their anatomy. Many of their statues of adolescents (the Borghese herma-phrodite is the most celebrated attempt of the kind) testify to a development of the breast, a slenderness of the neck, a build of the hips and thighs that suggest the female body. The Greeks, in order to produce this effect, were not afraid to use the amplification of modelling which Rodin has rediscovered and revived to-day. They were admirable handicraftsmen who made free with nature and rules."

The best Renaissance artists will be found to have worked with the same freedom, and yet with a fidelity to the Nature they had before them that gives to their productions a permanent interest. As Monsieur Mauclair remarks, Botticelli paints his girls lithe, Correggio his blondes chubby ; Rubens gives to his maidens a substantial milky complexion ; Rembrandt makes his heavy women amber-tinted ; Goujon fashions tapering nymphs ; Michael Angelo swells the muscles of his colossus ; Fragonard and Boucher put on their canvas a plump, nervous Parisian dame ; Houdon and Clodion represent their Parisian as pure or puerile, whereas Puget had previously shown her sublime in grief ; Degas marks her with the plaits of the corset and depicts her awkward and sensual ; Renoir



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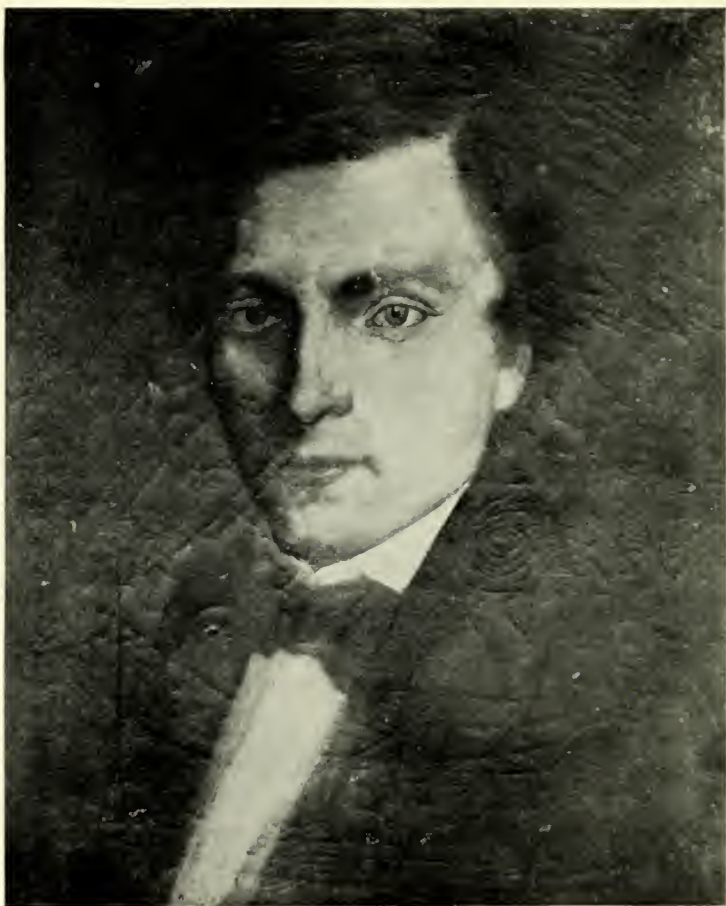
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reveals her as a tropical flower, and Besnard as a pearl in human form. And all are right, all have expressed what is true; and all have made mistakes of proportion, but it is life which has dictated and is responsible.

Thus we have a tradition of art followed by a minority, in which individual nature, with its attributes of time and place, has been closely studied and reproduced according to the interpretation of the artist. He gives to his effigy the likeness he sees, but adds relief or shadow, amplifies here, diminishes there, knowing that only by so doing can he create an illusion of life and accentuate its significance. On the other hand, we have an academic tradition, followed by a majority, in which the reproduction of nature is carried out according to artificial rules which general experience shows to be erroneous. Both traditions practise a deformation of the living model, but that of the former gains by it a more spiritual and bodily reality, while that of the latter attains only something that is impersonal and conventional. Painting or sculpture therefore of this academic kind must fail to permanently touch and interest the emotions.

It is amidst these divergent tendencies that Rodin's life-effort has been made. To illustrate in detail what he has contributed to the healthier tradition, to relate the battle he has waged against the academic Baal to which so many of his contemporaries have bowed, is the object of the ensuing chapters. Told, as it must be, with certain reticences, which are due to a man still alive, the narration will throw quite enough light on Rodin's character for it to conquer our sympathies and our profound respect. To the renown of his masterpieces this book can add nothing. What it may reasonably hope is to lay open through their history a little of the sculptor's mind.





PORTRAIT OF RODIN AS A YOUTH

*By Barnouvin (see page 65)*

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## CHAPTER II

### CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH—THE APPRENTICE

AUGUSTE RODIN, or, to give him his full name, François Auguste Rodin, was born in Paris on the 12th of November 1840, in a house that no longer exists, but which stood in the Rue de l'Arbalète and bore the number 3. The street is a small one lying between the Val-de-Grâce Hospital and the Church of St Médard, in the outskirts of the Latin Quarter, and not far from the Jardin des Plantes, the Panthéon, and the Sorbonne. The cutting of wide boulevards and the rebuilding of houses and some old monuments have a good deal changed the physiognomy of this part of Paris; but the changes are not so complete as elsewhere, and a present-day visitor to the Rue de l'Arbalète will find nooks and corners that have conserved their appearance of sixty years ago.

The date of the birth was registered two days subsequently at the Mairie of the Twelfth Arrondissement, the witnesses being the baby's father, an architect named Denis Xavier Moine, and a baker, Jacques Guillier, whose three names, ages, and addresses figure on the certificate. The father's age is given as thirty-eight. By a curious coincidence, in this same year another future sculptor was born, though of much less fame, who, during the Balzac controversy, attempted to rival with his greater brother-artist in a statue-sphinx of the novelist, which was exhibited at the 1896 Salon, two years before Rodin allowed the public to see his statue. When the infant Auguste came into the world, the July monarchy appeared to be firmly established, and nothing betokened the uprising of 1848,

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in the course of which the Panthéon was seized and occupied by the insurgents, whose fighting he was destined to catch glimpses of, without understanding what it all meant. Politically, 1840 was marked by nothing more important than the fall of the Thiers ministry and the advent to power of Monsieur Guizot. In literature, which was the only branch of art really prolific throughout the reign, there was not much produced at this date. The two publications of note were Mérimée's "Colomba," and a volume of poems by Victor Hugo. In painting, the ardour of the early Romantic movement had cooled. One of its apostles, Géricault, was dead, and Decamps with his orientalism was the rising celebrity. Sculpture was about at its lowest vitality. By contrast, therefore, all the more significance attaches to the fact that, amid this lull and stagnation, a child was born whose single efforts were to raise the statuary art of his country to a higher achievement than it had ever reached in the past.

Jean Baptiste Rodin, the sculptor's father, was of Norman origin; by profession, he was a clerk in the offices of the Prefecture of the Seine, and remained in this post until he was pensioned off. The family of the sculptor's mother, whose maiden name was Marie Cheffer, came from Lorraine. At the time of her son's birth, Madame Rodin was thirty-four. There was one other child, a girl, by name Clotilde. It is possible that some of the Rodin ancestors may have been of the number of those anonymous Gothic sculptors already mentioned in the Introduction, and that the skill of the forefathers, after slumbering through a long line of descendants, at last awoke in this modern scion to fresh activity and recognised renown. Be that as it may, Rodin knows no relative, either ascendant or collateral, who has distinguished himself in art.

Being the son of a modest employee, he passed his

## Childhood and Youth

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first childhood in a small elementary school near his home. When he was between nine and ten, his parents, by dint of sacrifices not uncommonly made in France in matters of education, contrived to send him to a boarding-school, kept by a relative, an uncle, at Beauvais, a town celebrated for its carpet manufacture founded by Colbert, but more famous for its Cathedral, which has been termed the Parthenon of the Gothic. Here he remained until he was fourteen. His life during this absence from home was not very happy. Boarding-schools are useful to knock the nonsense out of a boy who has been spoiled by his parents, or who has an exaggerated opinion of his own capacities; but for a boy of retiring disposition, and such was the young Auguste, they are not always the best mental and moral nurseries. Something of the disdain of the rich for the poor was manifested towards the son of this Paris employee. Moreover, he was short-sighted, without knowing it, and much of what his teachers wrote on the black-board escaped him, arithmetical operations almost entirely. Yet, even with these disadvantages, he readily assimilated most of what he was taught. His general intelligence and his docile temperament stood him in good stead. Amid his ungenial surroundings, too, the charm and pleasure of childhood itself with its dreams and ever-fresh impressions gave him encouragement to make plans for the future. He was fond of drawing, though he had no inkling then that his future would be determined by it. The careers suggested to him by his boyish fancy were those of a doctor, an author, or a public speaker, the last especially. Often in play hours he would slip into the teacher's desk and begin to harangue the empty forms, his playmates on one occasion surprising him in a flight of eloquence. It was the artist instinct stirring and striving for some sort of expression.

At the age of fourteen, he returned to Paris with the

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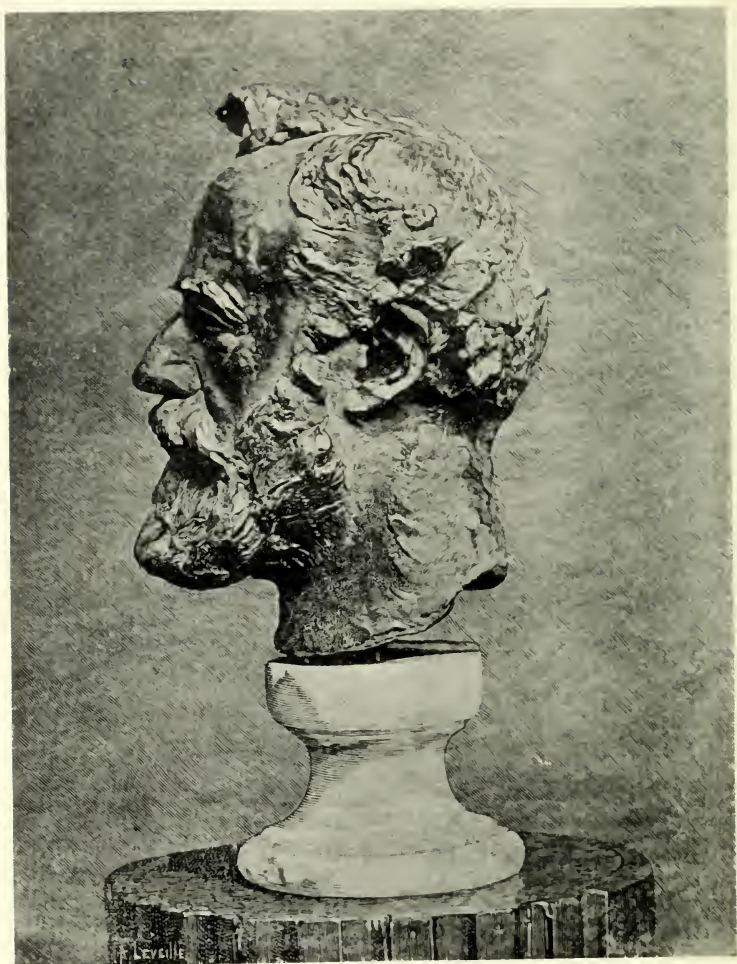
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intention of adapting himself to a handicraft. By this time, his tastes had declared themselves plainly enough for it to be seen that he was not inclined to engage in trade or business. It was not so clear what he was best fitted for. There was no paramount bent. His mind was equally alert and interested in several directions. In drawing, his skill had grown steadily during the latter part of his stay at Beauvais; but he was far from any precocious comprehension of art. It attracted him because its horizons were wider and did not cramp his fancy. Within the range were architecture, painting, engraving, sculpture, all connected; so that it seemed easy, at least in imagination, to pass from one to the other; but he thought less of their intrinsic worth than of the use they might be to him. For a year or two longer he was to take more notice of the outer aspect of things, reflecting only by intermittence and allowing the impulses of boyhood to sway his moods. To some extent he was affected by the general fever and excitement of the first Universal Exhibition which was soon to take place in the French capital; but what appealed to him most was the life of the Latin Quarter, half academic, half bohemian, the daily contact with the world of letters and art that surrounded him. The temptation to enter it was great, the more so as narrow means were not an insuperable barrier to any one whose aims were higher than mere selfish enjoyment. A free Drawing School, situated close to the School of Medicine, which still flourishes, but has assumed the grander title of "L'Ecole des Arts décoratifs," appeared to offer the access sought; so he joined it.

The Principal was a man of no particular ability. One of the masters, however, Lecoq de Boisbaudran, combined with his real pedagogic talent a profound knowledge of drawing and painting. "During the time I attended his class," says Rodin, "I was able to initiate myself into many secrets." While there, the now ardent pupil rubbed







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elbows with not a few budding artists, some of them old pupils of the modest institution of the Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine, who had already entered the National School of Fine Arts. Among those who have since become noted may be mentioned two friends of his, Jules Dalou and Alphonse Legros, the former not long dead, the latter still living. It is interesting to remark that both of them, like Rodin, have had very close relations with England. Indeed, Legros may claim to have become English, since he has lived for forty years in London, where, in addition to his official teaching at South Kensington and the University, he has long been known as an engraver and etcher comparable to Rembrandt. His painting and sculpture are less celebrated, but his statue, "The Sailor's Wife," and his pictures, "The Angelus" and "The Stoning of St Stephen," which were exhibited in the Paris Salon, as well as a number of other productions, prove that his artistic execution in these branches also can attain excellence. Dalou had the advantage of being a pupil of Carpeaux. Compelled to fly from Paris after the Commune, in which he was involuntarily implicated through his appointment as curator of the Louvre during its reign, he took refuge in England, where, following Legros' example, he became a professor at South Kensington. Much of his subsequent sculpture was bought by English patrons of art, not the least specimen being his group of the late Queen Victoria's dead children at Windsor; another piece, the "Deux Boulonnaises," was bought by the Duke of Westminster. Returning to France after an eight years' exile, he produced, among other masterpieces, the fine bas-relief at the Chamber of Deputies, representing the Assembly of the States-General. Both Legros and Dalou were at the Drawing School a little before Rodin, the former being three years and the latter two years his senior; but their friendship, which in its

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commencement dates back to the late 'fifties, was none the less fostered by their common connection with Lecoq de Boisbaudran. The professor had a method which was known as "drawing from memory." His pupils were taught to study a subject so as to seize all the points that distinguished it as an individual from others of the same species, and then to endeavour to reproduce it according to these characteristic traits from the image remaining in the mind. The method was not looked upon with much favour by the professors of drawing most in vogue; but it formed such artists as Fantin-Latour, Cazin, Lhermite, and Guillaume Régamey.

Besides the lustre shed upon it by its distinguished professor, the Drawing School in its humbler days possessed a tradition of the eighteenth century, which it has since lost to its detriment. Free from the dictation of official academies, it then drew together a band of moneyless but earnest students in the morning, and of hard-working and equally earnest apprentice sculptors and ornamentists in the evening, who all initiated themselves into the art of the Louis XV. and Louis XVI. periods, and copied its masterpieces with their warmth of expression and their grace of design. It was while attending the morning class that Rodin found out his vocation. In due course, he began to try his hand at modelling, and the clay figures which his hands shaped gave him a pleasure he had not experienced in his drawing. Still, there was no sudden illumination or revelation. The pleasure brought increased ardour, the ardour a hope of some definite achievement later on, and for the moment that was all. As showing that at this age and for some time after he was unacquainted with that which was really superior in sculpture, the master relates a story of his passing by the statue of Marshal Ney, by Rude, which stood not far from his home, and of joining in the laugh of his companions at what were



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deemed to be its demerits. It was the fashion to sneer at Rude in those days.

Each part of the young student's day was now parcelled out and had its own occupation. Arriving at the school about eight o'clock in the morning, he worked till twelve in company with half-a-dozen companions, spending most of the hours in front of the sculptor's block. In the afternoon, he frequented the Louvre in order to make drawings of the Antique, or else went to what was then called the Imperial Library, where Michael Angelo's and Raphael's creations could be examined in engravings and some other books pertaining to sculpture. There was no great eagerness on the part of the staff to bring him the volumes he asked for; but, when he had them open before him, he made up for lost time, sketching with great rapidity, sometimes more than a dozen drawings being done at a sitting. The evening was usually devoted to recopying with care the hasty sketches made in the library or elsewhere, if anything had struck him. Sometimes, too, he went to read at the library of St Geneviève, situated close to where he lived, and open to the public at night.

Nearly all of these early studies have perished; it is probable, however, that they contained indications of that independence and originality of artistic treatment that come out more and more strongly in each successive stage of Rodin's career; it is practically certain that, even then, instinctively he avoided in his copying the servile imitation which he has so often condemned in utterances of his riper experience. One of these, though referring to a later date, may be usefully quoted here.<sup>1</sup> "When it was decided to copy Antiquity," he says, "what did we get? the sculpture of Louis Philippe's epoch—the quintessence of ugliness. I am sometimes

<sup>1</sup> Related by Mlle. Judith Cladel.

## The Life of Rodin

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said to belong to the Greeks. It is true perhaps, but that is not through copying them. If so, I should also produce Louis Philippe sculpture. There are people who fancy that, coming one day out of the Louvre, I exclaimed: 'I too will execute some antique'; and that I returned to my studio in order to reproduce what I had seen. Not at all! A visit to the Louvre is for me like an hour of beautiful music; it exalts me; it gives me a desire to work in my turn; it gives me, too, a transitory intoxication which one has to beware of; for work should be quiet and reflective."

The last sentence in this quotation is apparently a reference to the excess of his early enthusiasm, which caused him to encroach on his hours of rest and recreation, the penalty paid being attacks of gastritis. Another conversation of his maturity makes the confession that during this season of youth, like many others of his age, he had exaggerated notions of what sudden inspiration could do, and did not realise that perfection of any kind is only attained after long toil. To-day, by a comprehensible counter-effect of experience, he is apt to under-rate the role of inspiration. "Inspiration," he exclaims, "has no meaning in the artistic sense. It is the dream of the boy who fancies he can reach the summit of his ambition by some happy chance, just as in his sleep he finds a treasure that has no reality on waking. This dream has to be replaced by work—work which is accompanied by calculation and repeated effort. That is how I have learnt my profession, and such inspiration as I possess to-day does not come from accident, but is the result of years of toil."

This criticism notwithstanding, Rodin's natural genius, has to count in any estimate of his achievement. Tracing his development back through his productions, it is possible to discover certain dominant predilections which were born with him and have in a sense inspired every-

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thing he has produced. The two most patent are his deep religious sentiment and his Greek naturalism. One needs only to glance at the "St John," the "Creation of Man," the "Porte de l'Enfer," the "Main de Dieu," for the one, at the "Age d'Airain," the "Baiser," the "Printemps," for the other, in order to see how parallel the influence has been. The mind of the artist has doubtless come to deal with these forces more freely as it has developed, undergoing them less, mastering them more ; but they continue to pervade its atmosphere. How strong the religious sentiment was in boyhood is shown by the statement :<sup>1</sup> "When I was young and was present at the church services, I really absorbed a something that transformed me." Rodin then felt profoundly and still feels all that part of the Catholic religion which attracts by its grandeur and its attempt to render spiritual entities comprehensible through outward form and substance. Music, too, which has always been a passion with him, moved him strangely in its drawn-out harmonies of chant and anthem, while the edifices in which he heard it, with their carved windows, arches, and statuary, which he was to regard later with his enlightened sculptor's vision, evoked by means of his emotions a state favourable to the activity of his nascent powers.

Towards the end of his third year's instruction at the Drawing School, he ventured to send in his name for the competitive examination that then, as now, gave admittance into the "Ecole des Beaux Arts." This school, founded in 1648, has since been the recognised public institution for the teaching of painting, sculpture, engraving, and architecture. It possesses a large staff of professors ; and the majority of those who devote themselves to these branches of the fine arts seek to obtain their training within its walls. The candidates for the sections of painting and sculpture were required to come to the

<sup>1</sup> Related by Mlle. Judith Cladel.

# The Life of Rodin

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examination hall for two hours a day during a week. The living model placed before them in common was a man whom they had to reproduce in what way they chose, the ones on their canvas, the others in a clay model. The painters sat round in half-circular rows, in front ; the sculptors stood up behind. Each candidate, therefore, had twelve hours for the trial piece which decided the question of his entrance to the school. (Unluckily for Rodin's hopes, there were many, many youths who presented themselves with recommendations that he could not boast of. They were either friends of known sculptors, or pupils that had caught the trick of the popular style ; and, consequently, they were preferred to him. He was refused, not once only, but twice and thrice. ) It is certain that his contribution was not inferior to those of his fellows ; it is probable that it was much superior. The master, looking back upon his various pieces of work and passing condemnation here and there, praises these early efforts of his 'prentice hand. They were conceived and executed according to the eighteenth-century style, which has been the object of his consistent admiration ; his competitors themselves admired them, surrounding him as he stood fashioning the clay, and envying him the touch that his fingers imprinted ; they judged the merits of the composition with truer insight than their elders.

The failure to enter the Ecole des Beaux Arts was less of a misfortune than it appeared at the moment to the disappointed candidate. His nature, then eminently susceptible to impressions of the æsthetic order, and not yet provided with the experience necessary for their correct appreciation, might, if he had succeeded, have been biased and warped, and never have grown to what it is. As the matter turned out, instead of being placed in a hothouse of art and having his talent forced to a speedy fruitfulness, he was compelled to seek for himself





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the culture he needed. In after years, he recognised that this necessity had been a blessing. Dalou, who had been a student at the School of Fine Arts, once said to him, referring to these failures, "You were lucky. Whenever I do anything in my statuary that is bad, I attribute it to what I learnt there."

As a substitute for the official teaching he had been so anxious to obtain, Rodin for a while attended the class that assembled at the Jardin des Plantes, under the superintendence of Barye, who, in addition to his speciality as a sculptor of animals, had a considerable reputation as a painter. In 1854, Barye had been appointed to a professorship of drawing and sculpture in connection with the Garden Museum, but he was rather an influence and an example than a professor in the pedagogical sense of the term. In the afternoon, for nearly a year, the new pupil worked under Barye's supervision. The studio was a sort of cellar, and the blocks a few planks nailed together. Here, after the lecture, he and his fellow-students did their modelling at their ease; but first they had, like Mahomet going to his mountain, to visit the animals in the cages. When once sketch-book and memory were sufficiently garnished, they repaired to their blocks and endeavoured to transfer their designs to the clay; sometimes they did the same with the skeletons in the museum, fashioning the anatomical structure of the model, and then filling in the solid parts of the body. Neglecting no opportunity, Rodin paid visits also to the Horse Market, and, on one occasion, came across Rosa Bonheur there, dressed in the male attire she preferred when mingling in the crowd. Her famous picture had been finished and sold some years before, but, as she painted several reproductions of it, she made a point each time of refreshing her memory in the most practical manner possible. Although Barye's most distinguished pupil was not destined to adopt his master's speciality,

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yet on the two or three occasions when he has introduced horses or other animals into his pieces of sculpture, he has demonstrated in a striking manner that his hand can shape the animal body as cunningly as it can the human. His time with Barye, therefore, was not wasted. There was the technical training ; but, besides, there was the quickening germ that Barye deposited in his mind. Speaking of this, Rodin says : " It was he who, by fixing my attention on Nature and the necessity of understanding her, carried my artistic education to the point from which I could pursue it alone. A genius by his conception of art and by his power of expressing it, his works lacked only size in order to have had their claim to immortality more fully acknowledged. This lack of size was a pathetic testimony to his lack of means."

The life of the poor art student has its dark side. The keener his sentiment of the æsthetic, the more keenly must he feel the limitations that hedge him round. Rodin had reached that first crisis of youth, when the boy merges into the man, when the thoughts and desires of the former assume a more virile character ; and the outlook was not very promising. The palliative to his anxieties was furnished mainly by the quiet determination of his will, and the mutual encouragement that he and some companions derived in discussing their ideas and hopes together. Often on a winter's evening they would meet in a small room, where the fire sometimes burnt down ; but such was their inner glow that they troubled little about the coal's waning heat.

At the age to which he had now come, the would-be sculptor's immediate aim was to earn his own living. For a few months he worked in the studio of a sculptor named Roubaud, his friend Dalou also ; but Monsieur Roubaud did not pay them, and money was the great desideratum. After some inquiry and search it was found that the readiest way of putting his acquired knowledge and skill



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to account was by becoming the assistant of an ornamentist. Nominally, the ornamentist is a man who models in plaster all the ornamental parts outside or inside a building, except the statues and groups that are supplied by the sculptor proper; he especially concerns himself with the traceries of foliage and flowers, with grotesque heads and caryatides. The designs are given him by the architect; and, after he has made the plaster model, it is handed over to the mason or another workman to be copied into the solid material of the building. In reality, however, the ornamentist frequently plays a more active rôle. He suggests changes to the architect, proposes designs of his own to suit the plans submitted to him, and may encroach so far on the province of the sculptor as to produce pieces rivalling with the latter's bas-reliefs. In this profession of apparently minor importance there is room for the display of gifts of a high order. Rodin's opinion to-day is that the ornamentist's work can be quite as significant as the sculptor's. Of yore, it was so deemed, both by the ornamentist himself and those that employed him. This is why in so many old houses there are delicious bits of decoration that none of the imposing nineteenth-century structures can exhibit. Modern industrialism has killed out the personal element from a good deal that used to contain it, or accords to it so little attention where it exists, that its excellence is slowly but surely deteriorating. "I thought too," says Rodin, "that I was undertaking something quite inferior. I had to advance a long way before I discovered the erroneousness of my opinion."

In spite of his feeling of humiliation, the young assistant threw himself into his task with good will and a resolution to make the best of it. Near the workshop there was a garden. Putting into practice the precepts of Barye, he used to go there while modelling, and strive

# The Life of Rodin

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to note every detail in the intimate formation of leaf and stem; then, weaving the impressions he had received from plant or tree with the creations of his own fancy, he often attained results that astonished and delighted his employer. These, perhaps, would not have been so quickly reached, had it not been for an older workman, by name Constant Simon, who was in the same employ. A native of Blois, Simon had come to Paris to gain his livelihood. Notwithstanding his peasant origin, he was a born artist. Had he possessed his younger companion's energy, he might have risen to a higher position. Instead, he contented himself with showing a taste and perfection in his modelling that profited others more than himself. Rodin began to attempt similar effects, and found, whenever he followed the lead of his elder, he satisfied himself. The example of one other older contemporary seems to have been beneficial to him during this first apprenticeship, that of the figurist Chapman, to-day almost if not completely forgotten. The suppleness and elegance of his forms, quite in accordance with eighteenth-century style, pleased Rodin the more as he was just in that stage of development when beauty of every kind comes upon the senses as a novelty.

Up to the age of twenty-four, he continued to work as an ornamentist. The history of the years that lie between can be best reconstituted by their outcome; apparently devoid of incident, one week succeeding to another with little if anything to distinguish it from its predecessor, they were filled with a steady growth of knowledge, experience, and skill. Now that he could no longer dispose of his day, the evening was more than ever given up to self-improvement. For some time, he attended a designing-class at the Gobelins Tapestry Manufactory, more especially intended for those connected with the establishment, but open also to outsiders. The class was held six days in the week and lasted three hours. These



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eighteen supplementary hours, therefore, he took from his leisure and added on to his labour. It was, perforce, a period of privation; the wages earned were not large, and half was spent on materials and models for studies carried on outside of his trade.

When he was about twenty, his sister Clotilde died. She was a couple of years his senior, and, during the latter part of his boyhood, she had played somewhat the same rôle in his life as Henriette Renan in that of the author of the "*Vie de Jésus*." Proud of her brother, anxious for his future, she strove to encourage and stimulate him by praise—if need were, by gentle reproof, and was always at his elbow to help. Her genuine sisterly love was repaid by Rodin with a strong affection. He felt her loss deeply, to the extent, indeed, of his mind being almost unhinged. It was while in this condition that he was induced to enter a religious institution, at the head of which was a Father Aimard. This priest had gathered round him a number of young men of artistic talent, with the intention of training them for Orders and getting them to use their gifts in the service of the Church. There was much in the idea to tempt Rodin, his natural religious bias, which he had inherited from his mother, as also a touch of mysticism, combining with the impulse of the moment caused by his sister's death. For twelve months he remained with Father Aimard, uniting secular and theological studies; and in the interval the poignancy of his grief abated. Sooner, perhaps, than if he had not changed his course of living, he recovered his equanimity, and with it the consciousness that he had no vocation for the ecclesiastical estate. Consequently, when the good Father, at the year's end, invited him to pronounce the definite vows, he refused, withdrew from the institution, and returned to his former trade. The only tangible souvenir of this episode is a bust which Rodin modelled of the Père Aimard, and which is to-day



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in the possession of a cousin of his, Monsieur Henri Coltat.

Back in the world once more, he was soon reabsorbed in his old pursuits. He was still bent on becoming a sculptor. As the School of Fine Arts had denied him its patronage, he would ask for the suffrages of the Salon. Legros had had a picture of his accepted when he was only twenty. Rodin would appeal to the Committee of the Salon, which, he believed, would be broader-minded in its decisions. The one thing essential was to obtain a fit subject and to render it in a manner that should be approved by his own judgment, itself at present more exacting. Many pieces were executed and destroyed without being exhibited beyond the walls of the small room in the Rue de la Reine Blanche, close to the Avenue des Gobelins, where he had established his studio. He had more than his share of waiting and disappointment. One of his worst blows was the accidental destruction of a woman's bust that he had spent nearly two years in modelling and improving. The head and face of the original were beautiful; and he had lavished his labour, fondly counting on reproducing their charms. There were, however, brighter spots among the shadows. His marriage was its happiest event. At twenty-three he took a wife<sup>1</sup> from out the circle of his Paris acquaintance, a wife who has since shared all the vicissitudes of his career and remains to share in his triumph. A household was an increased responsibility at a moment when his means could ill support any; but, in the subsequent profit and loss account, the marriage figured as a gain. With a devoted companion to whom he could confide his hopes, the daily burden was more lightly borne, the persistent effort was more auspiciously made. Before twelve months of matrimony were over, he had produced his first master-

<sup>1</sup> Madame Rodin is not a native of Paris. She was born at Langres in the Haute-Marne department. Her maiden name was Rose Beuré.

# Childhood and Youth

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piece, known in the list of his works under the title, "L'homme au nez cassé."<sup>1</sup>

It was the bust of a man with ravaged features, forehead full of wrinkles, bristly beard, and a nose that was twisted and flattened ; and yet the face was stamped with a nobleness of expression that looked so much the more striking for its contrast with the ruin to which it was attached. The circumstances that led to the making of it are worth being told. One day, a man belonging to the humblest class of society came to the workshop of the master-ornamentist to deliver a box. He had seen better days, but had sunk to the position he then occupied through misfortune and drink. "Did you remark what a fine head that fellow had?" exclaimed the employer, when the man had gone. Rodin, being busy at his modelling, had not raised his eyes. The question set him thinking. He made inquiries about the owner of the head, whom he ultimately induced to pose. The subject was to his mind. Probably of Italian origin, the man's face resembled types common in ancient Greece and Rome. What the young sculptor sought to do was to reproduce its essential lineaments, without accentuation or deformation, and true to life. The bust was finished in the spring of 1864, and sent in to the Salon with hopes based on his settled opinion that it was worthy of the Committee's approval. The estimate was under rather than over the mark. In seven years, his talent had developed prodigiously, and, in this attempt, had accomplished something greater than he was fully aware of. The work submitted was a revival of the best Greek realism with the addition of a complexer and intenser ideality, using the word to indicate the sum-total of thought and feeling evoked by the sight of the piece of sculpture, and transferred by the mind to the sculpture itself. "L'homme au nez cassé" was rejected. That which the judges could

<sup>1</sup> "The Man with the Broken Nose."

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not and would not approve was the liberty of treatment, the realism that dared to be guided by nature and cared little for abstract rules. Rodin quietly took his bust back, his conviction of its value being in no wise shaken. Henceforth, it was a treasure, serving him as a standard of comparison, and helping him also to have faith in the future. When, at last, he found himself famous, one of his first cares was to have it cast in bronze, in which setting it crossed the Channel, and was shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1881. At present, several copies exist in various hands. One was bought by Sir Frederick Leighton. In the Meudon Museum, there is still a plaster model of the "Man with the Broken Nose." The original has disappeared in the continued process of reproduction ; but it has been replaced by an exact facsimile, which is preserved as a precious souvenir among the Museum's thousand and one sculptural records.





THE "HOMME AU NEZ CASSÉ," OR MAN WITH THE BROKEN NOSE

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## CHAPTER III

### THE ASSISTANT—AT HOME AND ABROAD

TOWARDS the end of his twenty-fourth year, Rodin made a change in his occupation. He gave up working for ornamentists, and became a sculptor's assistant. His new employer was Carrier-Belleuse, who, born in 1820, was then in the heyday of his fame. A pupil of David d'Angers, he affected a statuary of the light and graceful kind in which the eighteenth century had excelled, and which Clodion, who died in 1814, had carried to its perfection. He is now best remembered by his marble "Hebe Asleep," which is in the Luxembourg Museum; but he produced a great many other statues that had great vogue during his life, and many busts, those of Renan, Théophile Gautier, Delacroix, and Gustave Doré being among the number. The judgment passed upon him by his illustrious employee is that he was a man of talent, but one who had not at bottom the stuff that constitutes the real sculptor. He was not capable of furnishing the slow, patient, continuous toil necessary for the attainment of the best results. He made delightful sketches; his ideas were full of novelty, even of originality; but, as soon as he attempted to execute them, his lack of study and preparation always acted as a drawback, and the perfection of the work was marred. Nature had imparted to him rich gifts; his mistake was in using them without thorough cultivation.

Technically speaking, Rodin became now a "figurist." His employment consisted in developing the sketches given to him, and in fashioning, for the most part, the small decorative figures, that is to say, the clay models of

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them, which largely made up his employer's sculptural production. In one sense he was a copyist, since the initiative was not his own, and the style of Carrier-Belleuse had to be imitated, in order for the work to be marked with that sculptor's name. Still, the employer left his assistant to introduce anything that the latter chose, provided it did not contradict his own manner. Such work was not the goal he aimed at, but it might lead to it. Through his connection with a sculptor so popular, Rodin trusted to be able, after a while, to make good his own claims. So he welcomed the introduction to the great man, obtained through the photographer who sold pictures of the Carrier-Belleuse favourite pieces.

It is curious that, although occupied for many years in the studios or for the studios of sculptors as an assistant, he was never, as has been erroneously stated, a *praticien*, i.e. a rough or a fine hewer of stone or marble. Indeed, this is the one branch of the statuary art which he has never practically learnt. For the benefit of those less familiar with the subject, a short explanation may be offered here. In one important respect, the sculptor's practice of his art differs from the painter's. While both artists generally execute one or several preliminary sketches, of which the finished work is, in the main, a reproduction, the sculptor is obliged, if his statue is to be in stone or marble, to spend some time in rough-hewing and shaping it before he can proceed to the detailed carving, whereas the painter can stretch his canvas on the frame in a few minutes. This hewing and shaping require no special ability, and can be very well performed by a person of little or no skill. To-day, however, the delegated work is usually carried much further. The clay model is fashioned by the sculptor himself with the same perfection that the stone or marble is destined to receive, and then almost the entire reproduction is carried out by subordinates. Ordinary masons are entrusted with the

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rough-hewing; and the fine-hewing and shaping—together, if need be, with the enlarging or reducing—in French called the *mise au point*, which bring the rough-hewn block into the likeness of the model, are performed by specialists, known as *praticiens*; <sup>1</sup> finally, the master-sculptor touches up as he pleases. When the assistant gets his rough-hewn block he mentally divides the figure into several large sections, and fixes on the various projections, corresponding to the axis of the subject and forming the summit of each of the sections, an indication called a guide-point. These points once established over the whole superficies, he measures the distance between them with a three-legged compass and marks it on the block. If the model is to be reduced or enlarged, he registers the measurements on a graduated rule and calculates the scale accordingly. The proportional indications are then fixed on the block, and points noted everywhere; afterwards a flexible rule is applied to the block, and an accurate knowledge is obtained of the principal line within which the contour lies. Now the assistant is able to begin fine-hewing his block into the elementary form of his subject. As he goes on, he verifies with the compass continually, making sure that the guide-points still correspond, and that the relief is the same or is in the same proportion as the model. These points are respected until the last, and, in shaping, a small projecting cone is left, which supports them. In order for the fine-hewing to be carried out in detail, new measurements have to be taken repeatedly and fresh guide-points inserted in all directions, so that ultimately there is hardly a square inch without one. The assistant's task, apart from his manual dexterity, consists in formulating and resolving in

<sup>1</sup> A rather different account is given by some sculptors. If one is to judge by their language, the *rough-hewer* is the *metteur au point*, the *fine-hewer* or *shaper* is the *praticien*. The touching up with the chisel, of course, Rodin always reserves for himself in its ultimate and finest execution.



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practice a number of geometrical problems. The difficulty is that the contours to be determined are not, as in geometry, regular figures, but modellings made up of a series of curves, the precise abstract expression of which is almost impossible to be found. It is the increasingly minute division of surfaces that enables the assistant to deal with each problem definitively by the sole exercise of eye and hand; when he at length delivers the statue to the sculptor, the latter has only to add here and there a few slight modifications suggested by his own critical judgment. Oftentimes, those who are responsible for the fine-hewing, and who execute the most delicate parts of it, are men of a talent, equal, and perhaps superior, to that of their employer. Sculpture is an unremunerative profession, except for a few celebrities, and not for all of them. Barye was dreadfully poor all his life, and Rodin has never been rich. Not a few sculptors are compelled to be assistants as long as they live, with now and again an opportunity to sell something of their own.<sup>1</sup>

However, to return from this digression, it was not as a *praticien*, but as a modeller that Rodin began his new duties in the year 1864, duties which, with one or two short intermissions, he continued to perform until the year 1870. He had to do with an important share of all that issued from his employer's studio within that period. Notably, some of the decorative relief in the long room of the Louvre by the side of the Seine, which was formerly called the "Salle de Rubens," was executed by him. It may be seen towards the farther end of the room in two round mouldings of the ceiling. In the Church of St Vincent de Paul, there is also a little from his hand. Of the "Hebe" in the Luxembourg, parts of the arms and feet were his modelling; but the bulk of his work was done

<sup>1</sup> One of Rodin's *praticiens*, Louis Mathet, is an example. His "Oread," which was at the Salon in 1903, was sent to the St Louis Exhibition in the United States in 1904.

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for private commissions, and the pieces are scattered far and wide. What would be interesting, if possible, would be to see some of the sketches given him by Carrier-Belleuse, and to compare them with the finished production, in order to find out how far his own individuality was maintained or altered. It may be presumed that the incessant carrying out of designs not his own affected his style, at least for a time. For such a deviation to become permanent, his character would have had to be of more commonplace type, largely yielding to circumstance. Ultimately, he came to see the defects of what he copied—even those that were most hid—and, by his natural reaction against circumstance, the liability to be influenced by them ceased. As an offset to any temporary disadvantage he suffered, may be counted the deftness, carried to an extraordinary degree, which he acquired in the use of his tools. The smoothness and fineness that Carrier-Belleuse put into his statuary were favourable to the cultivation of this dexterity, which yet was partly an inherited gift. Besides, Rodin had ample occasion for studying effects in grouping. Before adopting his definitive method, so entirely original and different, he had proved to the point of absolute certitude that the maximum of effect is secured not only by giving to each figure the position assigned to it by its real action—that is, by obeying the energetic, not the merely ornamental motive—but also by enclosing the whole group in a geometric solid, triangle, square, oblong, parallelogram, etc., according to Nature's teaching.

In the early days of his connection with Carrier-Belleuse, and before he had completely reconciled himself to the idea of a long stay with one employer, he left Paris twice to undertake work in distant towns. The first engagement took him to Strasburg. At the Drawing School of the Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine, he had known a young Alsatian, a poor youth who had laboured in his



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native place as a stone-mason, and who, feeling a call to higher things, had saved money and come to Paris to study. Returning once more to Strasburg, he showed great skill in sculpture of the Gothic style, and obtained many commissions in church building and restoring. It was to help him in this task that he requested Rodin to join him, and the latter, who had already produced his "Man with the Broken Nose," went and began modelling for his Alsatian friend. He did his best, which, however, was not quite like what his companion could do. In both the Roman and the Gothic, the former stone-mason astonished Rodin by his effects. He would take one of the figures Rodin had fashioned, add a touch here, another there with his chisel; and it assumed the exact likeness of the old carving of the Middle Ages which the Parisian sculptor loved and admired without as yet possessing its equivalent perfection. After a brief spell in such occupation, Rodin grew homesick and preferred to come back to Paris. His second absence was due to an offer made him by Fourquet, a sculptor who was working for the Marseilles architect Cavalier on the Palace of Fine Arts in that city. Rodin went down, visiting on his way Lyons, Vienne, Aix, Nîmes, observing curiously the ancient architecture which he came across in plenty, and wondering at the Grecian types of women. With Fourquet he remained for two or three months; but their notions of sculpture did not agree, and the Marseilles sculptor was less disposed than Carrier-Belleuse to trust to the initiative of his assistant. Rodin, therefore, abandoned the post and again retraced his steps to the capital.

The Franco-German war, which made such havoc in the ranks of young artists, luckily did him no more physical hurt than forcing him to endure the siege of Paris. While it lasted, he served as a National Guard. When it was over, the necessity of seeking for means of



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subsistence decided him to quit Paris temporarily. His employer, Carrier-Belleuse, had gone away from the French capital on the breaking out of hostilities, and proceeded to Brussels, in answer to an invitation from the Belgian architect Suys to undertake the ornamental carving of the frieze along the two lateral façades of the Exchange. Leaving his wife behind, to join him when he should have made another home, Rodin started as soon as the gates were open, and before the commencement of the Commune. His first idea was to go to London; but, taking Brussels on his way, he called on Carrier-Belleuse and was induced to resume his place in his old employer's studio. Here he met with a young man of twenty, Julien Dillens, the future sculptor of the "Silence of the Tomb," whose talent, at that age remarkable, had attracted the attention of the French master and procured him a very considerable share of work on the friezes. In spite of the difference in their ages, they became intimate, the elder imparting to the younger the benefit of his experience and finding in him a willing disciple. Rodin was occupied by Carrier-Belleuse nearly all the time that the latter remained in Brussels, modelling quantities of little figures in that sculptor's style, which were straightway signed by the employer with hardly any modification and sold, undistinguishable from his own. After the Commune had been repressed and Paris had somewhat recovered its normal activity, Carrier-Belleuse returned to France, although much of the decorative carving at the Exchange was still unfinished. There was no question of Rodin's accompanying him, since they had just fallen out over some commissions which the assistant had ventured to execute apart from his employer, and they had in consequence separated.

It was an embarrassing moment for Rodin. One trouble after another had been heaped upon him; he had lost his mother a short time before; he was alone in a



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strange land ; and, as he sat pondering in his lodging of the Rue du Pont Neuf, bitter and almost despairing reflections assailed him. Happily, he had strength and patience to wait ; and, within a brief period, matters took a turn for the better. A Belgian, named Van Rasbourg, who had been a fellow-assistant with him in Paris in the studio of Carrier-Belleuse, had come back to his native country, following his employer ; and, when the latter abandoned his undertaking at the Exchange, he recommended Jean Rousseau, the Director of Fine Arts, to pass it on to his Belgian assistant. In reality, Van Rasbourg was not fitted for the charge. He was a man of timid temperament, whose timidity extended to all he did. His aptitude in sculpture was chiefly in the modelling of baby figures, a talent inherent in Flemish art since the days of François Duquesnoy. Needing a colleague who could supply his deficiencies, Van Rasbourg applied to Rodin with an offer of partnership that gave the greater artist full liberty of action in his modelling but perforce denied him the right to claim it as his. Rodin accepted, and the two set up a studio in the Rue Sans-Souci at Ixelles, close to the town. There they prepared all their figures, helped for a time by Julien Dillens. It need hardly be said that the more important pieces of sculpture were due to Rodin. Inside the Exchange, the four large caryatides and the children on the tympan are his, and outside, the two groups representing Asia and Africa on the upper extremities of the monument. Another undertaking in common, almost as considerable as that of the Exchange, was the embellishment of the "Palace of the Academies," a former residence of the Prince of Orange. It was a project which Rude had been on the point of executing, and for which he had modelled a quantity of designs. Here, two groups, the one representing Cupid measuring the terrestrial globe, the other, the torso of the Apollo Belvedere, together with some other ornamentation, though signed by Van

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Rasbourg, came almost entirely from Rodin's hand. In the palace of the king, two bas-reliefs representing eight of the nine Provinces, and, in the Conservatorium, two caryatides with two children above them were furnished by the two partners and largely by the anonymous one. There were, besides, pieces of sculpture of less essentially public character. M. Sander Pierron, a Belgian writer, in his "Art Studies" mentions three figures out of four at the angles of the monument raised in Antwerp to the memory of the Burgomaster J. F. Loos, and a number of caryatides in the Boulevard Anspach of Brussels. Six of these, on two houses forming the corners of the Rue Grétry with the Boulevard, he esteems to be the sculptor's finest carving in Brussels. Rodin is not of the same opinion. He considers his work in the Exchange and the Palais des Académies to be his best.

The statuary which he modelled in the Belgian capital added to his knowledge in more ways than one. It was, of course, on a large scale, and this in itself was a new experience. And then most of it was for setting up out of doors. Now, in every country, the atmosphere reacts most appreciably upon the stone and marble carving exposed to its ambience. The reaction varies according to the dryness or dampness of the air, and affects not only the substance of the sculpture, but the play of light and shadow upon its surfaces. The sculptor who shapes figures or ornaments for erection in the open air must be able to calculate what will happen to them under the atmosphere's caress, and so fashion his block that the illusion of life he creates shall endure. In Brussels, the air is saturated with humidity, even in the dry season. Its action upon his groups Rodin was able to study day by day, as the workmen wrought his designing into the stone; he saw how each figure looked under the grey of dawn, under the midday clearness, and under the dusk of evening, beneath the glare and blaze of the sun, or the



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duller tints of cloud and rain; and he came to better understand how to establish his planes and contours so that they should ward off attack and allow the figures to retain their beauty.

In harmonic contrast to these absorbing labours was the background of his home life. Content to mingle then, as now, with the humble, he took pleasure in the conversation of his landlord, who was a gardener. Perhaps the good man had rather a hazy idea of his tenant's artistic superiority; what was more manifest was his great respect for his tenant's French wine, some of which not infrequently found its way on to his table. The sculptor's home was no longer the little lodging of the Rue du Pont Neuf. When his circumstances improved, he went to reside at the extremity of Ixelles, in the Rue du Bourgmestre, number 15. Here he lived modestly, partly from choice, partly from necessity. While earning a fair amount of money, he was forced to pay out goodly sums of it in order to pursue his art. His wife, at any rate, never complained. What she received she made suffice for the needs of the household; and, in glancing backwards from the present, finds that the days passed in the Belgian cottage were among the happiest she has known. His Sundays in winter Rodin mostly spent either at the Palace of the Academies, where the Museum of Sculpture was at that time situated, or in the Museums of Painting, scrutinising and sketching much as he had been accustomed to do in Paris, only with a more cultivated and a keener sense of the beautiful. The summer Sunday afternoons he frequently employed in making himself acquainted with the environs of the town, with its well-wooded retreats, where he often paused to draw or paint, often also to do no more than enjoy the reveries that stole over his senses. Now and again in the week-day evenings, he would wander out alone into the suburbs, sit down at a wayside inn door, or in its summer-

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arbour, and drink a glass of beer while listening to some rustic band or other, or watching the twilight creep over the landscape.

This plain manner of living made people fancy him to be poorer than he was. On one occasion he was obliged to summon a Doctor Thiriar to attend him, and found, when the bill came in, that the Doctor had charged him only a very small fee. It was a kindly act, and all the more praiseworthy as Monsieur Thiriar had not then acquired the eminence in his profession he has since attained. But Rodin, not wishing to pay less than he could afford, insisted on modelling a bust of his physician and making him a present of it. The bust was subsequently exhibited at the Brussels Salon, together with another of Jules Petit, a celebrated singer of that time and an old fellow-pupil of the sculptor's at the School of Drawing. In 1875, he sent two busts to the Paris Salon, one in terra-cotta, bearing the name of Monsieur Garnier, the other in marble, with an initial M. B.<sup>1</sup>; they were accepted; but to-day the sculptor has nothing to say in their favour; he prefers his connection with the Salon of his own country to date from his second masterpiece. Although not really famous in Belgium until its exhibition, his reputation grew steadily throughout his six years' residence in Brussels. Discerning amateurs gave him occasional orders or procured him some. The merit of these smaller *objets d'art*, executed while larger and more important works were claiming his time and attention, was necessarily unequal; but none of them lacked delicacy and grace. Monsieur Sander Pierron gives as an example two miniature busts of women, Suzon and Dosia, made for the "Compagnie des Bronzes." Cast in three sizes, the largest of which did

<sup>1</sup> This latter was in reality a reproduction of the "Man with the Broken Nose," executed by another person and sent in under the sculptor's name. B. stands for Bibi, a nickname of the man who posed as a model.

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not exceed forty centimetres, including pedestal, they were sold by thousands in Belgium.

The middle part of Rodin's sojourn abroad was, financially speaking, the most prosperous. What he then gained enabled him to put money by, and to gratify his desire to travel for the purpose of making acquaintance with the works of art that lay scattered in distant cities. Antwerp, Bruges, and Ghent were comparatively easy of access, and were visited more than once. Their cathedrals were the foremost objects of his eager attention; and the education of his taste in Gothic architecture, for which Notre Dame de Paris had done so much, was resumed and perfected. The perfection was the more rapidly reached, since he had gone through practically the same apprenticeship as the carvers of old—had, like them, made long and patient efforts which were now beginning to yield results. He saw how they had combined with their religious faith all the bubbling, native emotion and imagination which no creed could altogether restrain. He felt himself akin to these men of the forests—he was himself a man of the North—whose tamed faculties had not lost touch with race instincts. A superficial observer may pass by ancient churches and perceive nothing, except perhaps in the gargoyles, of the racy, secular element lurking in the sculpture that adorns niche and portico, or in the ornamental designs that enlace pillar and frontal. Rodin beheld it, and it set his nerves a-dance. He thoroughly understood those artists who had thus affirmed their love of outer form while contributing to perpetuate the worship of its inner meaning. What they translated into stone was the entire life of their epoch, with the mark of the soil and the region upon their carving. The art pilgrimages begun in Belgium were continued in France, as opportunity offered. It is impossible to date them all, made, as they were, at irregular intervals and





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in different ways, one being a short holiday excursion, another a few hours' halt when passing through the place, a third the combination of business and pleasure. In this manner, most of the cathedral cities were visited—Chartres, Rheims, Rouen, Dijon, Amiens, etc., some of them much later than others, but yet all linked by their influence to this period, when he first fully learned to love them. Referring in one of his conversations to the impression produced upon him by the cathedral of Chartres, he says<sup>1</sup>: "It appeared to me like an integral portion of the world whose function was to be always beautiful. Its two towers, the one carved and the other built only of ragstone, plain and bare—how well the architects understood what must be sacrificed to effect, and what discipline over themselves they must have exercised to build enormous walls like those of a citadel, and to leave the grace and ornament for one single tower! Though I have thought about their art all my life, I do not yet understand it. I cannot summarise it. I feel it, and feel it profoundly, but cannot express it; the general structure of it escapes me; and though I have made many observations, I shall probably never be able to draw from them a useful conclusion."

In the year 1875, he made a few weeks' excursion into Italy, wishing to study there the chief specimens of Renaissance art, and more especially the sculpture of Michael Angelo. While modelling in Brussels one of his own pieces, the figure of a sailor, he had been suddenly struck with its resemblance to the Italian master's carving, some of which he was already familiar with. He endeavoured to explain the phenomenon, but without success. Hitherto, his efforts had tended to a greater perfection in the fluidity of his lines, and he had not consciously sought to imitate any one's style. He now made a number of sketches to see if he could intention-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Mdlle. Cladel in her book, "*Rodin pris sur la vie.*"



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ally reproduce such characteristics of Michael Angelo's statuary as he could call to mind; the attempt failed. Urged by the conviction that there was a something essential to the mastery of his art which he as yet did not possess, and still dreaming of future pre-eminence, he started for Michael Angelo's country, travelled as far as Naples toward the south, as far as Venice to the west, but spent much of his time in Florence and Rome. What affected him most were the tombs of the Medici, and in them the modelling less than the expression. He failed to discover the principles that he believed to underlie their composition; but, comparing Michael Angelo with Donatello, he came to the conclusion that the latter was the more original artist of the two, and that the former had probably borrowed whole bodies, or at any rate parts, from his predecessor, without himself understanding the cause of their perfection, yet giving to them greater decorative value.

It was only after his return to Brussels and a further patient observation of the movements of his living models, when they came to pose, that light broke in upon his mind. It was an independent rediscovery that he made of a few simple laws applicable to sculpture and yet of vast significance and utility, if applied rightly and by the trained artist. The first was that the spontaneous attitudes of the living model were the only ones that should be represented in statuary, and that any attempt to dictate gesture or posture must inevitably destroy the harmonious relation existing between the various parts of the body. In the observance of this law primarily resided the superiority of antique over modern sculpture. The second was that, as under the suggestion of successive impulses the outlines of the body are continually changing, muscles swelling or relaxing, with a sort of rhythmic flow and ripple round them, the sculptor had large liberty allowed him to choose in his modelling the

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reliefs and curves that most faithfully and most effectively interpret the pose they accompany. It was deformation he would practise, but deformation with a view to increasing expression, and maintained within the limits of the natural; the combination of accentuated parts would be arbitrary, since his will and judgment alone decided, and yet necessary, since the object aimed at was the most vivid impression of reality. Too often it is forgotten that the sculptor, like the painter, works in symbols. The dashes of colour laid on the canvas are not the trees or houses or water they represent, but the painter of genius makes us fancy them so. Similarly, the marble shaped like a man cannot by the mere solidity of its form give the illusion of flesh. The modelling alone can force the symbol to take on the appearance of life, and it must be a modelling that uses light with its scale of shades instead of colours, and the deformation of surfaces instead of perspective. The third law was a deduction from the action of gravity in the equilibrium of the body. Every one acts on the practical knowledge acquired when the child learns to walk, that whatever movement half the body makes in any direction, the corresponding half makes another which counter-balances it. If one shoulder goes up, the other comes down; if one hip projects, the other recedes; if the spine and head lean forward, the thighs and legs lean back. There is an invisible centre of gravity round which the surfaces of the body are grouped, and the planes that enclose them must be observed by the sculptor if his statue is to possess the equipoise of forces exhibited by the living model.

In the Greek laws of sculpture, this variability of equilibrium was reduced to a rhythm of four lines, four volumes, and four surfaces. Thus, for example, when a man rests on his right leg, he is bound to produce these four surfaces, volumes, and lines, starting from the shoulders in

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one direction through the pectoral slopes, returning through the hips, making a third slant through the knees, opposed to the second, and a fourth slant opposed to the first. In Michael Angelo's sculpture the figure is generally so balanced that the two intermediates disappear, and instead there are two chief surfaces, volumes and lines, one somewhere in front, and another which sweeps down the block towards the side or back.<sup>1</sup> He was not the first to practise this simplification. It is occasionally found in Greek statuary also. His originality would seem to lie more in his conception of the human body as a piece of architecture, and in executing his works on the principle that a statue, in order to have natural harmony, ought to be contained, as has been said above, in a simple mathematical figure—a cube or even a pyramid. With such a conception, extravagance of design is certainly avoided.

Having by his patient investigation and reflection found out the methods of the Italian master, Rodin was able to utilise and even to improve on them. In some respects, he was farther advanced when he went to Italy than ever had been the man whom he wished to study. Michael Angelo limited himself in his living models to the human figure; landscape he neglected entirely, so that he could not paint a tree or a plant of any kind. In designing architectural ornament, therefore, he was shut out from the originality he aimed at. Later on in life, he ceased drawing from nature at all; a change for the worse consequently took place in his painting, as may be seen when the Doomsday frescoes in the Sixtine Chapel are compared with the figures of the vault executed in his best style. On the contrary, Rodin's adherence to nature, begun in his ornamentist apprentice days, grew more fervent, more

<sup>1</sup> This rather technical subject will be referred to and further explained in the chapter devoted to Rodin's conversations.

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intelligent, more constant with every year that passed. His stay in Brussels co-operated to make this adherence a habit; and now that he had mastered the secret of antique and Renaissance sculpture, the strengthening and purifying of his artistic personality could not fail to follow. The comparison often made between him and Michael Angelo is sustainable only as regards their common power of evoking intense and vivid expression. The relationship ceases as soon as the narrower range of forms produced by the one shows side by side with the boundless exuberance of the other.

Of other old masters whose excellence he strove, while in Belgium, more thoroughly to analyse, were Rubens and Rembrandt. Having abandoned their art for sculpture, he returned to it as a means of improving his own. His reproductions of Rubens' famous pictures from memory were a prelude to his later performances with brush, graving-tool, and pencil which will be noticed in a separate chapter. What he examined and admired in Rembrandt was the creation of form by light alone. Henceforward, the Dutch painter was a sort of "Demon," in the Sophoclean sense, obsessing him and urging to a further research of chiaroscuro in each of his pieces of statuary.

Among those that surrounded him at this time, he probably gave more than he received in influence. His age, his abilities, his manner, with its tranquil deliberateness verging on the gently supercilious, carried weight and conferred authority. For the younger workers in Van Rasbourg's studio he was a counsellor that was listened to and obeyed. If they ventured to advise in turn, it was to beg him to issue from his retirement and show his genius to the world; to which he replied that there was no hurry. "When one was sure of doing something, a little waiting made no matter; a single statue could establish a reputation." These words were a prophecy.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE MASTER

THE year 1877 saw the end of Rodin's voluntary exile. It was less long by half than that of Rude, but Rude was younger when he went away, and fortune was kinder to him among strangers. The work which had been Rodin's main occupation was terminated. That which he could procure on his own account was not continuous. The intervals would have been agreeable enough, since he was always studying and modelling with a view to the future, if only his commissions had been better paid; but the prices received were little in proportion to the time and endeavour bestowed. So far, his profession had been almost as financially unprofitable as the labour of Sisyphus had been vain.

During the last eighteen months of his stay in the Belgian capital, his thoughts had a good deal dwelt on the chances he might have, if he returned to Paris, of realising his long-deferred hopes. The best way of becoming more widely known, as it seemed, was to present himself again at the Salon with a piece of statuary that should on this occasion force the approval of the critics. The question of a subject had to be settled first, and a number of experiments were made, only to be abandoned one after the other. None of them corresponded quite to his state of mind and the trend of his reflections. Greater leisure had given him more opportunity for indulging in country walks. Accompanied by his wife, he rambled off, whenever possible, through field and forest; and found compensa-







THE "ÂGE D'AIRAIN," OR PRIMEVAL MAN  
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tion for his material disappointments in communion with nature, of the kind practised and described by Wordsworth. Such communion was also a stimulus to his imagination. A poet in the old and true sense of the word, he saw into the hidden Paradise of earth; and the vision haunted him when he came to handle his clay and caused him to identify his human forms with those of tree and flower. It may be guessed that these habitual excursions would predispose him to choose a subject in harmony with the state of mind they induced. The preference was further determined by his favourite author, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose *Man of the Woods* grew more real to him as he withdrew himself more from society. Rousseau he had learnt to appreciate, especially in certain moods. Unable to confess his feelings, and suffering from the constraint of silence, his spirit, overburdened now and again, was relieved and refreshed by the lyric outpourings of a mind as much in touch with nature as his own. This explains why, in speaking of his woodland wanderings, the name of Rousseau is almost sure to be associated. Other authors compelled him to action. With Jean-Jacques he could rest and be at home.

So it happened that his idea was to represent one of the first inhabitants of our world, physically perfect, but in the infancy of comprehension, and beginning to awake to the world's meaning. To carry it out, he secured as a model a Belgian soldier named Auguste Neyts, whose trade, apart from his military service, was carpentering; a plain simple fellow, but of a certain native refinement; well-featured, and with just sufficient instruction to respect things beyond his understanding—in fine, the very man required. The statue, when completed, was a full-sized nude figure in plaster, very evidently a type of some primitive age, but the precise symbolism of which was just undefined enough to allow of more than one

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reading. Prior to its departure for Paris, it was exhibited at the "Cercle Artistique" in Brussels, and there were plentiful conjectures as to its significance. Some supposed it was a vanquished warrior expressing by his attitude the profound discouragement of defeat. The sculptor's intention, however, supplies the best interpretation: the man of the First Ages, strongly built and muscled, an emblem of creation, one of the stones which Deucalion cast behind him, and which rose painfully into human form. The figure stands with his right arm aloft and stretched back over his head as if to force the brain beneath to quicken, and the heavy eyelids to open. His left arm, raised so that the hand is higher than the shoulder, grasped—when the statue was first modelled—the top of a staff almost as tall as himself, and seemed to press it downwards, so as to aid him in escaping from the soil out of which he had sprung. The staff was removed subsequently, as somewhat interfering with the play of the light on that side; but, for the position of the arm to be rightly apprehended, the staff should be mentally restored to its place. The body is magnificently wrought, exact in its construction of bone and sinew, and curve of flesh. Rodin's present judgment of this, his second masterpiece, is that it is rather cold, implying, no doubt, that it contains less of the intense passion, latent or active, which characterises his maturer sculpture. However this may be, the figure produces in the beholder something of the same emotion presumably aroused in those far-away men of the Bronze Age by the perception of the world's mysterious phenomena. The coldness, therefore, can only be relative.

Rodin came back to Paris in the spring of 1877, bringing with him his statue, which was duly presented at the Salon and admitted for exhibition. Once there, it was impossible that its claims should be overlooked. The Salon Committee were not habituated to have such

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realism submitted to their inspection. They examined it with curiosity ; its proportions and details were wonderfully true to life, so true, indeed, that some of the more sceptical asserted the figure must have been moulded from the living model, a method not unknown in the statuary art. The same accusation had been made, but with less emphasis, on the occasion of the figure's exhibition at the Brussels "Cercle Artistique," and publicity had been given to it by the *Etoile Belge* in its issue of the 29th of January. The sculptor immediately wrote an indignant letter of protest to the Editor, in which he said : "If any connoisseur will do me the pleasure of investigating, I will put him in presence of my model, and he will be able to ascertain for himself how far an artistic interpretation is from a servile copy." Whether the Salon Committee were cognisant of what had been said in Brussels does not appear. In any case, they might have manifested a little more acumen.

Referring to the charge they brought, Léon Maillard, in his study on Rodin, says : "None of those who gravely asserted that the 'Age of Bronze'<sup>1</sup> had been moulded from the living body could be ignorant that, if this thing had been done, the effect would have been completely different. Instead of the noble figure of superior proportion and palpitating modelling, there would have been something pitiable and lamentable ; the art of the sculptor would not have sufficed to restore harmony to parts in which no unity was left. They could not be ignorant that the most clever moulding never amplifies the form but enlarges it only, and that the outlines as well as the modelling lose the infinite perspective of which they are composed. Consequently, even if a body could be moulded in its entirety, the moulding would only approximately reproduce the body of which it was the impress. The

<sup>1</sup> This statue is commonly known under the title of the "Age d'Airain."



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proportion would have changed, and the apparent breadth would have been developed to the detriment of the height. This is the reason why mouldings can never endure examination except in fragments; in the fragment, the unity is completed by the thought, and the anomaly perceived in the whole figure does not show."

Although, therefore, the accusation was improbable on the face of it, an inquiry was ordered by the Under-Secretary for State, Monsieur Edmond Turquet, after Rodin had lodged with him a formal petition. The inquiry was entrusted to some Inspectors of the Fine Arts, among them being Paul de Saint Victor, the well-known writer of that time, and Charles Yriarte, an equally celebrated art critic and dilettante. In spite of the individual loyalty of the Committee of Investigation, they seem to have been biassed by the authority of the accusers. Unable to find any proofs of the charge, their report was drawn up in such a way as not to declare themselves convinced of its falseness. Again the sculptor petitioned the Minister in a letter, a copy of which has been preserved. With a Spartan briefness adding to the pathos, he asked for speedy justice to be done, drew attention to the precariousness of his situation, and the undeserved odium inflicted on him. Besides, in order to neglect nothing that might throw light on the matter, he acted on the suggestion of the sculptor Guillaume, had mouldings taken from various limbs of a living body and photographs of the same, in order that they might be compared with the modelling of his figure. Even this did not produce the desired effect; he was poor and without influence; against him were men whose opinion carried weight; and he might have remained under suspicion indefinitely, had not events themselves combined to justify him. First, there was Auguste Neyts, his model, who offered to come to Paris to give evidence in his favour, just when the Director of the Fine Arts

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Department had bethought himself of sending to Belgium to look for him. Certain of the most prejudiced held that this was useless, so the journey was not made. Something else, however, was destined to confound the accusers; for it so befell that the sculptor Boucher, then a pupil of Paul Dubois, discovered Rodin one day in the workshop of an ornamentist, engaged in fashioning, without any model, some little children holding a cartouche. He remarked the extraordinary skill and life-likeness of the modeller's work, and related to his master what he had seen. In turn, Paul Dubois went to the sculptor's studio, accompanied by Chapuis, another sculptor; and, after a prolonged and careful scrutiny of original productions<sup>1</sup> he found there, convinced himself that the hand which had shaped these children needed no artificial aids to have produced the "Age d'Airain." He at once communicated his conviction to his colleagues, with the result that a letter was despatched to the Fine Arts Department, signed by Carrier-Belleuse, Laplanche, Thomas, Falguière, Chaplin, Chapuis, and himself, which was not only an entire refutation of the charge trumped up against Rodin, but a high eulogium of his talent. Three years after its first exhibition, the "Man of the First Ages" was cast in bronze, and in this form returned to the Salon, where it was awarded a third-class medal. A fuller recognition of its merits was its purchase by the State. For a while, it stood in a shady walk of the Luxembourg Gardens, its tints growing mellower under the breath of the atmosphere. More recently, it has been removed to the interior of the Museum, where it now stands almost opposite to another of the eight pieces of Rodin's sculpture which are there.

These protracted negotiations and inquiries had

<sup>1</sup> There were three especially, one, the "Creation of Man," a second, a torso of "Ugolino," and the third, a Joshua with lifted hands commanding the sun to stand still.



# The Life of Rodin

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lengthened out months into years. Ultimate satisfaction was given to the sculptor only in February 1880. Meantime, he had had to live; and, failing orders for statuary, which were hardly to be expected until his name should be cleared, he, for a third portion of his career, began to hire out his handicraft as a figurist whenever he could. For skilled workmen exercising this profession there was always a fair demand; and in the domain of industrial art he had acquired a certain reputation during his connection with Carrier-Belleuse, much of whose sculpture had been executed for industrial and manufacturing enterprises. One of his commissions in the twelve months following his return was for the forthcoming Universal Exhibition of 1878. The Trocadero Palace had just been constructed, and some of the outside ornamentation had been entrusted to a Monsieur Legrain, who delegated a part to Rodin. He modelled a number of grotesque heads on the side facing the Champ de Mars, some on the projecting arch at the inmost part of the semicircle, others on the water-spouts that were placed on the fountains. These latter were removed subsequently, and are at present in the possession of the authorities administering the Museum of Decorative Arts provisorily situated at the Louvre.

That Rodin was fully occupied at this moment may be gathered from an extant letter from Legrain, pressing him to get on with the work, and wondering why he had not heard from him. Whatever the occupations were, they did not hinder him from sending in a bronze bust of a lady to the 1878 Salon, and setting about another statue intended for the 1879 Salon. It was splendid tenacity and courage to go on in circumstances of so little promise. He had a small studio, a mere shed, some twelve feet square, in the Rue des Fourneaux, to-day Rue Falguière, number 36, where he devoted every spare hour in the evening, as well as in the day, to his new artistic venture. Here was made the St John





ST JOHN

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preaching in the desert. However, he was only able to finish the head in bronzed plaster, which, together with a terra-cotta bust of Madame A. C., was accepted by the Salon committee. The entire statue in plaster was exhibited in the following year.

The modern St John, in other words the model, was an Italian fresh from the mountains of his native country. He had never posed, and was quite unacquainted with the various noble gestures imposed by academic stylists. His relations with Rodin laid the foundations of his fortunes as a model, and he subsequently had ample occasion to become familiar with the tricks of the trade. The sculptor tells how, when the man first came to pose, he merely ordered him to raise his arm and commence to walk. The model did so. "There, now, stop, and keep that attitude." The simplicity of the procedure comes out strikingly in the statue. So spontaneous is the gesture, and so accurately has the posture of the body between two seconds of movement been marked and caught, that it creates an illusion of motion. On approaching the figure, one gets an equally strong impression of living mobility in the somewhat gaunt framework, with its play of muscle and articulation. A closer examination shows the skin tightly drawn over the protuberances, whether of bone or tendon, and soft where there is no strain. In the gait there is a ponderousness that accords with the notion of the preacher weighted with his mission.

But this physical perfection attained by the modelling, though wonderful, is not that which most properly entitles the St John to rank higher than the "Homme au Nez cassé" and the "Age d'Airain." What the sculptor did in his third masterpiece was to make the physical serve uniquely to suggest the spiritual. The preacher is so entirely unconscious of his corporality that the spectator transcends it too, and sees at last only a plastic rendering of the Voice crying in the Wilderness.

## The Life of Rodin

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On the whole, the statue was favourably noticed at the Salon. Such unfriendly criticism as was offered either referred to the impropriety of presenting a preacher without clothes—the real St John had at least a sack-cloth about his loins, Rodin had given his only a fig-leaf—or asserted that the pose was awkward, the legs too wide apart. As a matter of fact, detractors were at a loss for arguments. They could do no more than delay the day of compensation. More fortunate than the “Age d’Airain,” the “St John” waited one year only before it reappeared in bronze at the 1881 Salon; and, like the “Age d’Airain,” it was also bought by the State for the Luxembourg in 1884, a second triumph for the sculptor.

Before the close of 1879, Rodin had the pleasure of welcoming back to Paris his friend Dalou, who had a good deal to tell him about London and about Legros, whom he had left there. In the same year, business brought him into relations with Bracquemond, well known in England by his etchings of Meissonnier’s and Gustave Moreau’s pictures, and some of his own original paintings and engravings. At this date, Monsieur Bracquemond was at the head of the art department of an American porcelain establishment belonging to Messrs Haviland. His duties requiring him to secure sculptural designers for the articles produced and sold by his firm, he was led to make Rodin’s acquaintance in consequence of what he had heard of the “Age d’Airain” and seen of the “St John.” A visit to the studio of the Rue des Fourneaux resulted in some commissions being given, which for one reason or another were never executed. Doubtless, the sculptor’s hands were full. One of his customers at this time was a Monsieur Fanières, whose speciality was the manufacture of small pieces of jewellery, brooches, etc., and who came to him for the plaster designs. This, however, did not prevent the acquaintance with Bracquemond from ripening into warmer intercourse. Through the



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latter Rodin was introduced to the Goncourts; and through them he got to know Alphonse Daudet and most of the literary celebrities that frequented the house of the authors of "René Mauperin" and "Germinie Lacerteux." It is curious to note that the Goncourts used to boast of having brought three things into fashion by their writings: naturalism, the eighteenth century, and Japanese art. In the first two of these Rodin had long been an adept; the Goncourts had nothing to teach him. On the other hand, they may have helped him to gain a deeper insight into the third, which his conversations show that he admires. "The Japanese," he says, "study nature and understand her marvellously well." Rodin's intimacy with Bracquemond was rendered easier when he went out to live in the country, not far from Sèvres, where the engraver has had his home and studio for many years. The distance was not too great for an evening's walk and a chat, or a Sunday afternoon's visit after the week's labours. In the beginning of the acquaintance, however, he was in a small apartment in the Rue St Jacques, near where he had lived as a boy, and not very far from his studio. A year or two later he removed to the Rue du Faubourg St Jacques, also in the same quarter.

Very soon after his settling again in Paris, he contracted a third engagement with Carrier-Belleuse of the kind, now, he had had with Van Rasbourg. Carrier-Belleuse was more than ever occupied with the production of bas-relief sculpture for ornamentation; and Rodin, who knew his style and could imitate it to perfection, was a colleague he was only too pleased to secure. The agreement they made did not prevent Rodin from going on with private work intended for competitions or exhibitions, nor did it take from him the right to work for others; but, with these other tasks, it left him little leisure, and there were moments when he could hardly



# The Life of Rodin

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suffice to the day's task; it was his wife then who aided him in certain subsidiary details which might be delegated, as requiring no special knowledge of sculpture, but only the intelligent carrying out of a few simple directions.<sup>1</sup> Not unfrequently, when visitors came to the studio and saw one of these knick-knacks that he had made for his employer, and fashioned with the other's grace and smoothness, they preferred it to something that was really his own and was stamped with his genius.

And of his own he had always enough to show. Following on the "St John," he commenced a couple of statues suggested by almost the same order of ideas.<sup>2</sup> As these took him some time to finish, they will be noticed in subsequent chapters. While still waiting for his good name to be cleared, a project of the Government was made public for putting a monument commemorative of the Defence of Paris at the Rond Point of Courbevoie, where some of the bloodiest struggles between besiegers and besieged had taken place in the war of '70. The work being thrown open to competition, he resolved to try, though with no great expectation of succeeding among the large number of favoured candidates. His proposal, an allegorical rendering of the Vanquished Mother-Country—better known to-day as the "Genius of War"—was not even classed. The sculptor finally selected was Barrias, who more recently executed the monument of Victor Hugo standing on the square that bears the same name. Rodin's group was considered to be too violent of conception. For a statue intended to survive the passions connected with the events it celebrated, perhaps! And

<sup>1</sup> One thing which she was accustomed to do was the swathing of the clay models in moist wrappings, and maintaining the different degrees of damp necessary to the various parts, a most important accessory when the modelling is under execution for any length of time, since only by a most delicate judgment and the most constant care can the best results be obtained.

<sup>2</sup> The "Adam" and "Eve."





THE GENIUS OF WAR

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yet there was nothing in it that should offend. A winged female figure, naked to the waist, hovers above and close to a rugged pillar, against which reclines the body of a slain warrior. Her arms are extended, her fists clenched; one of her spread wings is bent and broken, but still beats the air, and her face beneath the helmet, covering her head, is distorted by the cry of anguish that issues from her open mouth. The upward bearing of each limb and the movement of the woman, contrasting with the limp, shrunken corpse of the soldier, whose broken sword tells its own tale, makes the allegory easy to read, with its call to the future through the horror of the present. Rodin was so interested in the central figure of his composition that, when the competition was over, he recopied it several times, introducing slight modifications. One of these copies, with the figure of the warrior taken away, from a desire to simplify the rest, is in the Pontremoli collection.

About 1879, Carrier-Belleuse was appointed Director of the Decorative Department in the National Manufactory of Porcelain at Sèvres. A wish to do a good turn to a man he respected and liked, and a legitimate ambition to bring a little more originality into the establishment and to change its routine, made him offer Rodin a position on the staff of artists employed by the Administration. This was in February 1880. As there was an opportunity of experimenting in a branch of his art which he had not hitherto essayed, and as the duties of the post were not absorbing, his attendance at the manufactory not being at fixed hours, but when he liked to go, and payment being according to the hours given, Rodin consented, and with his usual ardour set to learn all that Sèvres could teach him, or at any rate all that he had time to learn. Into the handling of the pastes he was initiated by one of the staff, Monsieur Taxile Doat, who tells of often lunching with the sculptor during this instruction time. They went to a restaurant at St Cloud, and usually, after eating,

# The Life of Rodin

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Rodin would pull out a couple of books from his pocket—Pascal, La Bruyère, or a translation of Dante—and, handing his companion one, would begin poring over the other. The modelling part was child's play to him after his long practice as a figurist; the only differences were the material in which he modelled, the increased fineness of design and relief, and the tools. Of course, there were technical processes which lay quite outside his province, such, for instance, as the baking of the vases, and, in general, the action of the fire on the colour and lustre of the pieces. These, as he owns, he made no attempt to master, contenting himself with his own art.

The afternoons at Sèvres—for it was mostly in the afternoon that he went—pleased him the more, as they afforded him the excuse for a long walk in the evening along the high, wooded country rising from the river or along the river banks themselves. It came to be a habit for his wife to take the boat as far as Sèvres and meet him, and then for both to saunter back to Paris, reposing by the way under trees, or, in the summer, at an inn where they would sometimes dine before getting home. It was during these rambles that many of the remarkable pen-and-ink sketches of subjects from Dante were made, about which more will be said hereafter. The distance from the manufactory to their home in the Rue St Jacques was a good five miles, but they were each robust, and hardly understood what it was to feel tired.

For the rest, willingly seconding the efforts made by Carrier-Belleuse to improve the quality of the Sèvres ornamental work, he substituted, as far as he dared, a fresher treatment of the subjects chosen, together with his own style of modelling. One specimen of the vases so decorated is at present in Rodin's house at Meudon, where the privileged visitor may examine it. Its fellow is in the Sèvres Museum. It is in hard porcelain, the ground colour being buff. The design is made up of



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figures in low relief, couples embracing, women and children, most perfectly and exquisitely formed in spite of their small proportions; they are placed on a landscape background with trees and water in it, and the suavity both of drawing and tint is charming. Some other smaller vases are also on view in the Sèvres Museum, among them an allegory of winter. Monsieur Roger Marx has perhaps the most representative pieces of this sort of decorative work of the sculptor, and has made a special study of it.

Rodin's connection with Sèvres lasted for about three years. It somewhat overlaps the next period of his life; but to deal with the end of it here is more convenient and logical, since he never hired out his services again. The reforms that he would fain have helped to initiate, he found, were opposed by the old and regular members of the staff. The conservatism common to all ancient institutions would very well explain this opposition; but against Sèvres a more special accusation is made by some men who, like Rodin, have had to do with it in a professional way. They affirm that the establishment is too much of a retreat for broken-down unsuccessful pupils of the Beaux Arts, who jealously keep things *in statu quo*, and resent any proposal to change the time-honoured traditions of the manufactory as an attack on their prerogative and privilege. What is certain is that Rodin had a good deal to suffer from petty annoyances inflicted on him by his colleagues during their association, if not openly, yet with equal efficacy and persistence. These he bore with phlegmatic equanimity as long as he thought there was a chance of seeing them cease; but, recognising at last his hope was vain, he resigned his post, and determined thenceforth to be his own master.

The moment was propitious. After twenty-five years of incessant, arduous labour, the profit of which had mostly been for other purses, the credit of it for other

# The Life of Rodin

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names, some measure of acknowledgment had been accorded him; and his title to rank among sculptors of merit was no longer disputed. Looking back on all he had gone through, there was the immense advantage of his having, so to speak, learned his art several times over, and each time penetrated into it from a different side. This was worth the obscurity and subordination he had paid for it. In commencing, therefore, a fresh stage of his career, he possessed an equipment probably more adequate than that of any contemporary sculptor, through the education of the eye no less than of the hand. In fact, it is his seer's vision which primarily constitutes Rodin's power. | "I do not create," says the "master," "I see, and it is because I see that I am able to make." - Assiduously cultivated during all the 'prentice years, this acuity of vision became a dominant factor in the statuary dating from the "Age d'Airain"; even now, in the autumn of the artist's days, it grows. |

Rodin is no exception to the rule that absence of mind in the ordinary relations of life accompanies the development of a peculiar faculty of artistic perception. Friends who knew him at the age of forty have more than one story illustrative of his frequent fits of abstraction. Aubé, whose statue of Gambetta adorns the courtyard of the Louvre, relates that Rodin was one day waiting for his lunch in the "Comptoir de Cristal," an eating-house patronised by several sculptors who had studios in the quarter of the Boulevard de Vaugirard. Absorbed in his reflections, he forgot what he had ordered; and, when an omelet was brought for a neighbour, he promptly seized it and had half devoured it before discovering his mistake. On another occasion, while engaged in an animated discussion, he allowed his long beard to descend into his coffee, and stirred it round with his spoon, quite unconscious of the unusual mixture. A third example may be cited which goes back to the





BUST OF MADAME RODIN

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time when he was in Brussels. He had gone out with Madame Rodin to Waterloo to spend the day, and, towards lunch hour, had sent her on to order the meal at a restaurant, where it was arranged she should wait for him while he went to visit a few things in the neighbourhood that he wished to examine. Madame Rodin accordingly betook herself to the spot, had a table spread for the two of them, and sat down to wait. One o'clock passed, but no husband arrived ; two o'clock, and still he did not come. Tired of waiting, Madame Rodin took her repast alone, and then, after vainly expecting him during the bigger part of the afternoon, started off to see what had become of the wanderer. She selected the road by which it was most likely he would reach the restaurant ; but, as ill-luck would have it, they missed each other. While she was gone, Rodin turned up, after rambling for a long time in utter oblivion of the flight of the hours. Unconscious of being extraordinarily late, he sat down at a table where he saw a lady already seated. Being still somewhat abstracted, and his shortsightedness helping the mistake, he began : " Well, Rose, and what have you got for lunch ? " Before explanations were finished, Madame Rodin came on the scene and was not a little taken aback to find her husband sitting with a strange lady. To her very natural question as to where he had been, he replied quite seriously : " My dear, I was waiting for you ! "



## CHAPTER V

### THE DECADE OF THE 'EIGHTIES

THE decade that takes in from 1881 to 1890 brought to Rodin more than the right to be his own master ; it carried his reputation with great rapidity beyond the boundaries of France and made it continental. England, America, and the various foreign countries of Europe in turn learned to look upon him as one of the most original sculptors France had produced. Among his own countrymen, he had, as was only to be expected, to put up with attacks which are always made when a fresh rival presents himself and challenges comparison with men and performances hitherto deemed superior ; and, as his statuary had an excellence that differed in kind as well as in degree from that which people had grown accustomed to, he was compelled besides to run the gauntlet as an innovator. The weapons at first employed were those of sarcasm and ridicule. When the "Creation of Man" was exhibited at the 1881 Salon, the advocates of smooth and serene sculpture were amazed and shocked to find that the artist had represented an Adam stretching himself painfully in his endeavour to rise from the clay of the soil out of which he had been fashioned. The comic papers immediately saw their opportunity, and one of them printed a caricature of the statue, with our first parent as a hunchback, and a rhyme underneath asserting—

"Than Adam there writhing, sure, nothing's more funny,  
So just go and see—it is quite worth your money.  
The monster's not human ; 'Gad, judg'd by the plan,  
He must be a corkscrew aping a man."





THE CREATION OF MAN, OR ADAM

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# The Decade of the 'Eighties

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To raillery of this sort succeeded criticism of a more serious and some of a more virulent sort ; but neither the one nor the other was able to prevent a current of public opinion from declaring itself in Rodin's favour.

The incident of the "Age d'Airain," with its satisfactory conclusion, had rallied to his side a few staunch defenders among writers on art, who did him then, and have since done him yeoman service. And Monsieur Edmond Turquet, after espousing the sculptor's cause, was not the man to draw back. Long after the necessity for his intervention had ceased, and indeed during all the time he was Under-Secretary of State at the Fine Arts Department, he continued his active support. It was owing to him that, in the year 1882, Rodin had a studio placed at his disposal, free of any rent or charge, in the Repository of the State Marble, situated in the Rue de l'Université, No. 182. The spot is fairly central, being a few yards distant from the Champ de Mars, and, what was more essential, quiet. In the part of the street skirting the premises there is little traffic; and the visitor might imagine himself in a provincial town, the impression being increased when he enters the long spacious yard, with its plots of garden, its tall curtain of trees, and its range of one-storied buildings running right and left. Blocks of stone, large and small, and plaster-covered frames that have served their purpose and been cast aside, are scattered about; on some, time and weather have begun to deposit a black dust turning to green moss, others still keep the white colour that tells of their recent connection with quarry or studio. For more than twenty years now, the Rue de l'Université has been Rodin's professional address; but it has not prevented him from having places to work in besides. His private studio in the Rue des Fourneaux he continued to rent for a year or two after receiving Monsieur Turquet's gift, and then quitted it for another larger one in the Boulevard de

# The Life of Rodin

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Vaugirard,<sup>1</sup> No. 117. A greater proof of the Minister's regard was the commission for an important piece of sculpture to be bought by the State, the "Porte de l'Enfer" (Hell Gate), which will be spoken of again. The way in which the commission was given proved that the Under-Secretary of State was desirous of making the sculptor public reparation for the stigma that had been cast upon him. It was fortunate for Rodin that the Fine Arts Department was then under the control of a man who, during the seven or eight years he was in office, carried out many reforms, and consistently strove to render Government patronage more efficacious in reaching the most deserving artists.<sup>2</sup> After his retirement, Rodin, in token of gratitude, made a bronze lion and gave it to him.

Another name which must be specially mentioned here is that of Roger Marx, who, quite a young man in the early 'eighties, but exceptionally talented and versed in matters of art, took up the cudgels on the sculptor's behalf, foreseeing his coming greatness, and foretelling it amid the derision of the older school of critics. The acumen and sureness of judgment of which Roger Marx was the possessor soon brought him into close relations with the Fine Arts Department, which afforded him occasions of aiding Rodin even more effectually than by his pen. The share he had in three of the latter's monuments will be related in the proper place. His brilliant articles, as each masterpiece was produced, can only be alluded to here. All of them are full of instruction, going to the root of the subject and having a style in which the matter is always equal to the form. When, in 1887, he became secretary to Monsieur Castagnary, the Director of the Fine Arts Department, he helped Rodin to obtain

<sup>1</sup> The building has been recently pulled down, and the part of the Boulevard in which it stood is now called the Boulevard Pasteur.

<sup>2</sup> Rodin also speaks of the Minister's secretary, Georges Hecq, now dead, who was useful to him at this time.



# The Decade of the 'Eighties

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the commission for the large group of the "Baiser" (the Kiss), at present in the Luxembourg. Though, no doubt, the Legion of Honour decoration conferred on the sculptor in 1888 was a voluntary recognition of his merits by the Government, it is pleasant to note that the award coincided with Monsieur Marx's secretaryship. In addition to numerous newspaper contributions, the eminent critic has published a remarkable study on the master's dry-point engravings; and, after an exhaustive examination of the ceramic sculpture executed for the Sèvres Manufactory of State Porcelain, many specimens of which are in his possession, still more recently a monograph on the subject which will amply repay perusal.

Rodin's first relations with England date back to the beginning of the 'eighties. During his visit to Legros in 1881, he was introduced to a few well-known Englishmen, with two of whom, Henley and Robert Louis Stevenson, an after-correspondence was maintained. In the chapter treating of these relations at greater length, letters from these two writers will be given, as bearing on their opinion of the sculptor and his work.

Most of his early band of friends in France were drawn to him by the disputed "Age d'Airain," or the "St John." This was so with the painters Besnard, Roll, and Eugène Carrière, the last of whom told the author of this book how he was led from step to step of admiration and respect, each higher than the preceding. The same may be said of Jean Baffier, best known in England as an ornamental sculptor, but whose "Marat" and "Master Ironworker" prove no mean skill in statuary. "Such a man," he said to himself, after studying the "St John," "ought to belong to the Salon Committee." So he voted for Rodin, who in that year, 1883, had three votes.<sup>1</sup> Those of Aubé and Captier were the others. This circumstance led to his being

<sup>1</sup> It was not till 1889 that Rodin was placed on the jury.

# The Life of Rodin

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introduced to the master, who later invited him to do the fine hewing of one of the busts of Victor Hugo. "I did not make a very good job of it," says Baffier; "at that time I was too little imbued with Rodin's ideas to be capable of carrying them out well; but he was indulgent, as always, and accepted what I had done without grumbling. He had all the more to alter." Another man who, like Baffier, may in a manner be called a pupil of Rodin, each of them being considerably his junior, is Jules Desbois, also renowned for his ornamental sculpture, some of which is in the Luxembourg, and for his statue, "Death and the Wood-cutter." The acquaintance was made in 1878, when the latter was also employed by Legrain in the decoration of the Trocadero. Between 1880 and 1890 and even later, Desbois was glad to work under the direction of the elder artist, finding in so doing his "*way of Damascus*," to wit, the system of modelling all the surfaces of a statue simultaneously by continually walking round it. A glance at any of his productions, posterior to this collaboration, will suffice to prove that he is distinctly Rodinian—the bust of Rodin, for instance, which he executed in 1904 and sent to the Düsseldorf Exhibition. His name recalls those of two other disciples, Camille Lefèvre and Fagel. All three worked together at their sculpture in earlier years; and all three, after going to school again under Rodin, stood out as his champions whenever there was a lance to be broken. Just before leaving Brussels, the sculptor came into contact with Constantin Meunier.<sup>1</sup> A close intimacy was subsequently formed between the two men; nor is it impossible that the Belgian master's change from painting to the statuary art was influenced in some degree by their intercourse.

It was only to be expected that in this first efflorescence

<sup>1</sup> Died in 1905. Several of his pieces of sculpture are now in the Luxembourg.





PORTRAIT OF RODIN

*By Sargent*

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# The Decade of the 'Eighties

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of fame, such of Rodin's admirers as had the skill should wish to paint his portrait. In England, John Sargent and Legros, and in France, Jean Paul Laurens and Carrière produced likenesses, within short intervals of each other, which it is instructive to compare. All four are most various in style, and curiously different in expression. That by Legros is in profile, and shows only the head, energetically poised, full of serious purpose, melancholy even, lacking the serenity which the sculptor's face has taken on in maturer age. The hair hangs almost unkempt over the forehead; the heavy moustache hides the determined mouth, as the short bushy beard hides the square chin, which are prominent in the portrait of his early youth by Barnouvin. This Barnouvin was a fellow-student of the sculptor's, "and in things of art possessed great poetic insight," says the master, "but without the power to become an original painter. He made copies of great pictures which were almost if not quite equal to the pictures themselves. I lost sight of him for a long time, then met him somewhat down at the heels, gave him a lift up, and again heard no more of him for years, myself preoccupied by the hard exigencies of life. More recently I came across him once more; he was worn out, a wreck, all marks of his former self lost. I did what I could, but from what I found out subsequently, I fear the aid was useless. He had sunk too low."

Sargent's portrait is a full-face half-figure. The melancholy persists in it, with a far-away gaze in the wide-opened eyes that accords with the relaxed muscles of the body and slight side-sink of the head. The beard is longer, the look older. That by Laurens gives the head and shoulders. The two eyes are seen, but the pose is only half-front, and profile from the nose downwards. A great deal of light is concentrated on the upper part of the face, and the expression is nearer to the Rodin of to-day, but still grave. The body is bent a



# The Life of Rodin

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trifle forward and the attitude is that of quiet contemplation. Carrière treats his subject in his own peculiar way. The features are bathed in a misty atmosphere, and contour and relief are indicated entirely by values of chiaroscuro. And yet there is a massive solidity about the face, and an approximation to the modern appearance of the sculptor greater than in the delineation by Laurens. The latter, indeed, has produced a second and rather more recent likeness of Rodin in one of the frescoes of the Pantheon, which is very characteristic of the sculptor. The angle is about the same as in the earlier portrait, but the head is raised and leans a little to one side and is covered with a cap. The bold curve of the nose is finely limned and the intentness of the eye well expressed.

As a sort of comment on these portraits may be quoted here the description given by Mademoiselle Cladel in her book of the impression made by Rodin when visiting her father's house. "I often used to see him," she says, "at our home in the country. On the Sunday he would arrive, with that shy, almost awkward air which concealed his worth. He sat in the garden, with his head bent as if the better to drink in the conversation and the good air. To the others he listened quietly, manifesting a rather old-fashioned respect for talent, whosoever it might be. He replied by a few words or a keen yet mild look, and left without joining in the conversation, but having paid attention to everything, and judged everything in silence. My father was of an ardent, expansive nature, abandoning himself in an exciting discussion, and quite different from Rodin, whom he called the illustrious *ingénu*. As for those who met him there, they did not understand him; his splendid animality puzzled them. Among these men of somewhat artificial stamp, he seemed like a big dog, or rather forest quadruped, for ever on the alert, sensitive, quivering; and they irreverently called him 'Gaffer Rodin,' a 'curious old

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fellow.' To tell the truth, I thought him so too ; although I had remarked the life that shone in his eyes and his sly, observing glance."

In October 1883, Monsieur Rodin, the sculptor's father, died. Since his son's return to Paris, he had lived with him in the apartment of the Rue St Jacques, No. 268. Pensioned off just before 1870, there seemed to be every probability of his enjoying a ripe old age ; but the war came, his wife died, his son was obliged to seek his living in a strange land ; and all these things saddened the end of his life. For some years prior to his death, he did not quit his room. It was Madame Rodin, his daughter-in-law, who nursed him with all a daughter's tenderness, replacing as far as possible the Clotilde of bygone days. A fact interesting to remark is that he was not much in favour of his son's becoming a sculptor. Although recognising, as was said in the first chapter, that his boy was not suited for business, he would have preferred him to enter some Administration, as he himself had done. Happily, he was spared long enough to see the beginning of the sculptor's success.

Rodin's fame, however, which grew and spread throughout this decade, was far from bringing him fortune, especially in the earlier years. His professional expenses augmented in proportion to the greater efforts made. Like the business man or the agriculturist, he had constantly to lay out sums of money, an adequate return for which was often wanting. The story goes that once happening to come into possession of a full-length male statue representing a political personage of mature years, he reflected on the use to which he might turn it, and necessity being the mother of invention, he calculated the thing out mathematically, and changed the old gentleman into a Bacchante. What is certain is that he continued his modest style of living, occupying an apartment of a few hundred francs' rent, lunching

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when he could not come back home to eat, at a cheap eating-house, and practising the old proverb: "Take care of the pence," in all that went beyond the essentials of existence. Looking back now, he smiles as he recalls the astonishment of an ex-State Minister of Belgium, who, happening to be in Paris in 1881, brought with him a gold medal which had been awarded the sculptor at the Ghent Exhibition, and which he did himself the pleasure of presenting in person. He found his way to 268 Rue St Jacques, climbed up to the little flat, rang the bell, and, in the absence of the master of the house, was received by Madame Rodin in her ordinary domestic attire. Although evidently having expected something else, he was none the less benevolent and kind, and, as he was old enough to be paternal, begged Madame Rodin<sup>1</sup> to give the medal to her husband, who, he felt sure, would be delighted to receive it.

After the death of his father, the sculptor removed to No. 39 Rue du Faubourg St Jacques, close to the Cochin Hospital. From here, a year or two subsequently, he went to No. 71 Rue de Bourgogne,<sup>2</sup> the street which runs up from the Seine, behind the Chamber of Deputies. Once again, he removed in the closing year of the decade, going to No. 23 Rue des Grands Augustins, this last being a narrow street lying between the Quay of the same name and the Rue Saint André des Arts. Each of these flats consisted of three or four rooms only, contrasting strangely with the magnificent residences occupied by so many Parisian celebrities in the world of art and literature. What made domestic economy, however, not only supportable but even agree-

<sup>1</sup> In this one particular the sculptor's memory is at fault. After the visit was paid, the Minister, who did not leave the medal, wrote a letter, asking the recipient to call for it at an address in Paris. The letter is signed "Robin."

<sup>2</sup> The number is now changed.

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able to the sculptor, was that he was an example of that philosophy of enjoyment which to-day he has the right to preach. By dint of seeking the beautiful in places where it may be found by everyone, he was never without lasting pleasures that cost him nothing. Like Chaucer, under the open sky, he could exclaim :—

“ Herkneth the blisful briddës how they singë,  
And see the freshë flourës how they springë ;  
Ful is myn hert of revel and solàs.”

In the year 1886, Rodin received commissions for two monumental statues to be erected in Chile, in honour of two men who had died just before, within two or three months of each other, and who had been famous in their country's history. It was then that he was negotiating for the execution of the Claude Lorrain, the Bastien Lepage, and the Bourgeois de Calais monuments, the second of which will be noticed in this chapter, and the two others later on ; and, no doubt, the stir made by these three events had their echo in the far-away country on the other side of the Andes. One of the dead Chilian heroes was a statesman, Benjamin Vicuña Mackenna, who, after sharing in the revolt of 1851, which caused him to be condemned to death, returned from exile and became a member of the Legislature in 1865. Especially renowned as a writer on Chilian history, he was entrusted with public functions ; went as a special envoy to Peru, and was elected a senator. Last of all, he stood as a liberal candidate for the Presidency in 1875. The other was Patricio Lynch, whose father was an Irish merchant, and who himself had served in the British Navy. He distinguished himself in the 1867 war with Spain and the 1880 war with Peru, deposing the Calderon Government there in 1881. Obtaining the rank of Admiral, he was appointed Chilian Minister to Spain in 1884. These were the men and the deeds that



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Rodin was invited to commemorate. He executed reduced models of the statues, sent them out to Chile through a Señor Morla Vicuña, and there the matter rested. In a subsequent claim addressed to the proper authorities in Chile, he related how he had been induced to commence the Vicuña rough model, owing to Señor Morla Vicuña's offer and the statement that subscriptions to the amount of 80,000 to 100,000 francs had already been raised. "The model having been begun," continued the sculptor, "he asked me for a second monument which was to be erected in memory of Admiral Lynch. For this there was as yet no subscription. I made the two small-size models somewhat under his direction, and it was Señor Morla who forwarded them to Chile. At that time, to help me in the casting expenses, he gave me a thousand francs. I desire, therefore, to have either my models returned, or an indemnity, supposing that my models have not been copied or executed. If they have, the indemnity should be more considerable."

Several letters of Señor Morla Vicuña bear out the foregoing account of the matter. In one may be read: "I propose to call on you to-morrow or the day after to-morrow. . . . The group of Admiral Lynch is very successful, and I am proud and pleased to be the sole possessor of it. [Probably this was a small copy which he was to keep for himself.] . . . I will send you a packer for the Vicuña Mackenna monument, which it is high time should be despatched."

From a photograph that remains of the first monument and a small bronze copy of the second, both preserved at Meudon, it is seen that each was appropriate to the men and the respective rôles they played. Admiral Lynch, as having also possessed General's rank and functions, is represented on horseback, reining in his charger with the left hand, and pointing forward with his right that grasps a short staff. The bearing is one







PORTRAIT OF RODIN  
*By J. P. Laurens (see page 66)*

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of calm, easy confidence, and both horse and rider are full of moving energy. The other, the statesman, stands as he may have stood before the Chambers that listened to his words. At the bottom of the monument are bas-reliefs illustrative of the Parliament's sittings; and on the socle is the figure of a woman—an allegory of the mother-country—reaching up with a gesture of gratitude towards the principal personage. Although not so thoroughly Rodinian as the later statues of the monumental order, both of the preceding are fine and historically noteworthy. One or two recent communications would seem to indicate that the mystery surrounding their non-execution under the master's direction may still be cleared up, and that satisfaction may ultimately be given.

To all the statuary having an interest more especially biographical, or belonging more especially to one category, in other words, to the great monuments and the busts, separate notices will have to be accorded, which will account for omissions here. The busts furnished most of what was shown of the sculptor's work at the Salon<sup>1</sup> between 1883 and 1890. The labour required could more easily be compressed into a few months. Upon the statues, the toil and study bestowed often kept them in hand for years, so that they were begun, progressed, were put aside, were taken up again alternately, hidden from the common gaze and shown only to those who were intimate acquaintances. Then, all at once, in the year 1889, not at the annual Salon, but at the Georges Petit Gallery, there was an exhibition which Rodin organised in company with his friend the painter, Claude Monet. No less than thirty-six pieces of sculpture were put on view, among them a "Bellona" in marble, a head of St John Baptist,

<sup>1</sup> For some years there was also an International Salon, which opened first in 1881, but which never flourished greatly. Rodin sent specimens of his work to one or two of these.

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"Galathea," "Walkyrie," "The Fall of a Soul into Hades," "The Idyll," a number of female satyrs, of sirens, of nymphs, "Perseus," "St George," "The Billow," "Temptation," "The Poet," "Ugolino," "The Danaid," "The Thinker," "Bastien Lepage," the "Bourgeois de Calais." Most of them were in plaster; some were, so to speak, first editions, destined to receive further treatment, and to become individually famous. This exhibition produced a profound sensation; and, when the quantity, the quality, and the shortness of time are considered, the production will appear phenomenal.

Though by temperament not a society man, Rodin saw more society during this decade than either before or since. It was the springtime of his celebrity, and everybody wished to entertain him. To those who were merely curious it was easy to say no; but to many animated by sincere regard he gave both time and company. One of the houses at which he was a frequent visitor had as its hostess the present Madame Waldeck Rousseau, at that time wife of Dr Henry Liouville, a well-known member of the French Chamber of Deputies. Madame Liouville's Saturday dinners brought together quite a galaxy of notabilities; it was through them, though not at them, that Rodin met and knew Gambetta. The hostess was possessed of considerable talent in painting, and, as artists were constantly her guests, a sort of habit was acquired of making drawings on the reverse side of the dinner plates, which were afterwards sent to be burnt in, and were guarded as souvenirs. This habit, of course, necessitated a continual renewing of the dinner service.

More than one club was able to boast of the sculptor's being on its list of members. He calls to mind especially *le bon Cosaque*, which most likely derived its name from the fact that Gogol, one of the founders, had written a novel in which Cossacks were largely concerned. Guy de



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Maupassant, Bourget, Mallarmé,<sup>1</sup> Becque, Richepin were among the literary men that frequented it; Roll, like himself, represented the artists. Of Mallarmé the master speaks with peculiar tenderness, regretting his too early death—with equal tenderness, too, of his incomprehensible poetry, which Mallarmé would read to him, and try to get him to appreciate, and which did contain gems that shone brighter under the light of their author's delightful personality.

It has been said in a previous chapter that Rodin knew the Goncourts. Traces of this acquaintance are found in Edmond de Goncourt's *Diary*, that have a certain biographical interest. In 1886, De Goncourt relates that he went with Bracquemond to visit the sculptor's studio. Apparently they had not met before, as he gives a description of the master, and finds that he resembles St Matthew, or some other disciple of the Founder of Christianity. It was an October day, and he was struck by the damp atmosphere of the room, and its odd appearance with all the clay and other models—not to forget two fantastic-looking, dried-up cats. Rodin was modelling one of the "Citizens,"<sup>1</sup> and the visitor notes the fine holes in the flesh, like those that Barye put in his animals. He was shown, also, a sketch of a nude woman, which the sculptor called the Panther, and regretted not being able to finish, as the living model, an Italian, had married a Russian who had fallen in love with her.

A later entry, on December 29th, 1887, mentions a dinner at Daudet's house. Here, the sculptor talked with him of getting up at seven o'clock, going to work at eight, remaining all day in his studio, except just a brief interval for lunch, and added that with so much standing on a ladder to work at his large-size pieces he was worn out in the evening. He mentioned, too, his struggle with the Hugo family about the poet's bust, the family wishing

<sup>1</sup> Bourgeois de Calais. See Chapter X.



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the three-story forehead of literature, and he wishing—the truth.

On the 26th of February 1888, he writes anent the “Baiser”: “Rodin confesses to me that for the things he executes to satisfy him completely when they are finished, he needs them to be executed at first in their definitive size, since the details he puts in after take from the movement; and it is only by considering these sketches in their natural size and during long months that he realises the movement they have lost, movement which he restores by taking off the arms, etc., and putting them on again only when he has got back the dynamic energy and the lightsomeness of his figure.”

In the last entry of the decade alluding to the sculptor, made in the following year, he says:—“Mirbeau has much frequented Rodin. He has him at his house for a fortnight or a month. He tells me that this silent man becomes, in the presence of nature, a talker,<sup>1</sup> a talker full of interest, a connoisseur of a heap of things which he has learnt by himself, and which range from theogonies to the processes of all the arts.”

From the quarter where the sculptor lived it was not a long distance to get out on to the south side of the suburbs of Paris, and make an excursion to the plateau of Châtillon heights, beyond Vanves, in the direction of Fontenay-aux-Roses. Here he was fond of going, on Sunday in the fine weather, accompanied by Madame Rodin, and often by his cousin, Monsieur Thurat,<sup>2</sup> whose wife made a fourth. At some convenient restaurant lunch was taken, a favourite *menu* being soup followed with boiled meat and cabbage. Then came the stroll out on to the hills, and a siesta on the grass, when Rodin would lie back with his hands under his head and dis-

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter XI. for illustrations of Rodin's conversational style.

<sup>2</sup> Author of a Life of Gambetta and numerous articles of criticism, who died recently.

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course in monologue, if dialogue failed, of anything that passed through his mind, and much of Nature's unperceived or neglected delights. One effect of his recumbent position was to lend to the perspective a somewhat fantastic appearance, oriental he used to style it. As thrift and hard work gradually brought him in the wherewithal to indulge his taste for wider wanderings, he was able at length to rent a house for several summers in succession at Azay-le-Rideau, in the Department of the Indre-et-Loire; thither he transported some of his materials, and carried on his modelling in surroundings that renewed his health and refreshed his ideas.

While living in the apartment of the Rue de Bourgogne, Madame Rodin had a serious illness, which for a time rendered her recovery doubtful. It was a great trouble to her husband, whose helpmeet, in the truest sense of the word, she had been throughout his struggles. He called in a Dr Huchard, and subsequently a Dr Vivier, thanks to whose skill the patient was restored to health. Rodin's gratitude not being able to express itself in money, since both medical attendants refused fees, the former was induced to accept a reproduction of the "Man with the Broken Nose," and the latter, who could claim most of the credit for the cure, with copies of two of his greater works, the "Baiser" and the "Eve." For Dr Vivier he has thenceforward retained the sincerest regard, giving him a warm welcome whenever chance brings him over from Fontainebleau to Paris or Meudon.

A dip into the sculptor's preserved correspondence reveals many things which he is too modest to mention or even remember. Thus, for instance, in this period, when his own position was far from being really brilliant, he did his best to obtain Government commissions for brother artists, whose letters of thanks bear witness to the efforts made. Or again, as an epistle of acknow-

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ledgment shows, he sent one of his pieces of sculpture to aid the funds of an orphanage. Some of the longer communications are quaint effusions from people he had known in his humbler days, replies to what he himself had written, and proving that fame had not puffed him up.

Not long after Madame Rodin's illness, there was a second visit to Italy paid in a way rather different from the first. "I am rather tired and want a little change and rest," he said one day to his wife. "I shall go away for a few days." Asked where he thought of staying—"Oh, I am not sure," he answered, "but probably near Paris." A week passed and no news came. Madame Rodin began to get anxious, in spite of her familiarity with her husband's habits, and, in fact, the more as she knew to what his absent-mindedness exposed him. At last, a letter arrived from Italy. He had changed his mind; and, after starting from home, had taken it into his head to go and renew the memories of a dozen years before. There were still things he wished to understand better in the old masters.

The only monumental statue begun and finished and inaugurated in the 'eighties was that of Bastien Lepage; and, as it was the "In Memoriam" of a dead friend, it may be dwelt upon in this chapter. Bastien Lepage was one of the band of artists who became intimate with the sculptor of the "Age d'Airain" in the beginning of the decade; the acquaintance ripened while he painted his portrait. How close the friendship grew to be between the two men appears from a letter to Rodin addressed by the brother of the painter when the latter was ill. The invalid had gone to Algeria to see if its milder climate would do him any good. "He wants you to write," said the brother; "you know how he loves you." Much in the characters explained this friendship. As artists they were both guided by the same absolute sincerity in their interpretation of nature; both were





BASTIEN LEPAGE



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sprung from parents of modest position, and had had the perseverance needful to make their own name in the world ; both owed everything to their native talent and to their enormous industry. The chief difference between them was the precocity of the painter, who, born in 1848, attained renown almost before manhood. However, among painters such precocity is more common. Rosa Bonheur produced her "Labourage Nivernais" when she was only twenty-three. It was his portrait of his grandfather which made Bastien Lepage really known, although an earlier picture, "The song of Spring," was remarked and bought by the State. Like others of Rodin's friends, he was appreciated in England, which he visited. While there, he painted the Prince of Wales's portrait ; and, on returning to Paris, he brought with him studies for his "Flower Girl" and "Handy Man." His pictures of country scenes are remarkable for the fidelity of their design and colour, and possess the same ideality observable in Rodin's sculpture. After his death, his most celebrated landscape, "The Hay," was purchased also by the State for the Luxembourg Gallery.

The Committee which was formed in 1885, within a year of the death, for the erection of the painter's statue at Damvilliers, his birthplace, contained four members who were fervent admirers of Rodin, viz. : Antonin Proust, the chairman ; Roger Marx ; the novelist, André Theuriet ; and a journalist, Monsieur Bazire. But there were other members who were less favourably disposed to him ; and, when the rough model was submitted for the Committee's inspection, a sharp discussion arose on the question as to whether the sculptor had not produced too naturalistic a figure. The details of the dress were criticised by the one side and defended by the other. Monsieur Marx, who went to the meeting with an anxious mind, had at last the satisfaction to see

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his views carry the day, and Rodin was authorised to proceed with the work. This was in June 1886. Three years later, in September 1889, the monument was unveiled. It will be seen further on that the execution was more rapid in this than in most of the monumental statues, partly because there was less labour, but partly also because of all the circumstances being more propitious, and of the sculptor's previous personal knowledge of the man. What he set himself to do was to fix the souvenir of an artist whose canvases are all faithful evocations of rustic scenes and whose art devoted itself to showing the poetic side of life in the open air. As he himself said during the execution: "I have represented Bastien Lepage starting in the morning through the dewy grass in search of landscapes. With his trained eye he espies around him the effects of light or the groups of peasants." Rodin's "Bastien Lepage" stands bareheaded, with legs wide apart, and in the act of stepping backwards as if to gauge the effect he has just produced in the picture on which he is engaged. He wears an overcoat and cape (the cape was an eyesore to some of the Committee), is gaitered and roughly shod, which indicates, as also the inequality of the ground, that he is at work out of doors. The left hand with the palette is close to the body, the right hand is extended in a simple, instinctive movement, and the naïve pose proclaims that the artist is thrilled by the redolent atmosphere of the fields. The face is most puissantly modelled, the small yet eloquent features being lighted up by keen, restless, but kind eyes that sparkle with animation. All the illusion of life that statuary can yield is in this figure.

The site was chosen for the monument just outside the gates of the Commune, and almost in the meadows. Only the statue was supplied by Rodin. The pedestal and its decoration came from other hands. The in-

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auguration ceremony took place on the last day of the month. Roger Marx accompanied the master, who was rather nervous on this occasion—the first on which a piece of his sculpture was set up in public outside a museum. They occupied a room together in Damvilliers. There were other triumphs they were yet to share. Before the end of this year, Rodin reached the grand criterion of human existence, the seventh seven, the age of forty-nine.

The "Danaïd," in marble, which visitors to the Luxembourg will remark as one of the suavest female forms which the sculptor has begotten, was finished also towards the end of the 'eighties. It is the nude figure of a young and beautiful woman lying sideways on some rocky ground, and in a paroxysm of woe. It is the classic myth which is embodied, and humanly. The face is half-buried; the dishevelled hair trails round it and over the broken water-jar; the fair limbs are weary of their eternal toil in Hades. There is exquisite research of rhythm in the contours of this masterpiece. Its subdued pathos softly touches more than one chord of the heart.

The close of the decade was marked by an event that agitated the artistic world and that turned to the advantage of the sculptor, as procuring him greater and better facilities for showing his sculpture to his own countrymen. This event was the secession of a number of prominent artists—both painters and sculptors—from the official "Society of French Artists," and the formation of a rival Salon under the control of a new Society calling itself the "National Society of Fine Arts." Rodin was one of the seceders. The split happened in this way. A special International Committee of Fine Arts had been formed for the year 1889, with a view to awarding medals and certificates to artists whose productions were approved at the Great Universal Exhibition. Owing to

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its special—and international—composition, the Committee made its awards on lines somewhat different from those usually followed by the Society of French Artists, not only as regarded foreign exhibitors, but French ones as well; consequently, some of the old favourites found themselves out in the cold, while men whose claims to recognition had been hitherto passed over, were given second and first-class medals. Rodin was on the International Committee; so was Meissonnier, and Dalou, and Carolus Duran; and they made good use of their opportunities. But when the ordinary Salon Committee met and was asked to confirm the awards of the International one, the official favourites and their supporters answered that the French Society of Artists was not bound by the decisions come to by anybody outside of its pale, and they secured a majority for a declassification of the Exhibition awards, as far as they applied to French artists. Meissonnier and his friends strongly opposed the voting of this scheme, asserting that the decisions of an International Committee were *ipso facto* of greater authority, and that it would be an insult to change them. When the Independent section saw they were in a minority, they quitted the meeting forthwith, betook themselves to the Ledoyen Restaurant in the Champs Elysées, not far from the old Palais de l'Industrie where they had been sitting, and there they discussed plans for founding a freer association than the one they had turned their backs upon. The result was that, in 1890, a second Salon opened its doors in the Galerie des Beaux Arts (a building remaining from the Exhibition), which was situated in the Champ de Mars. The new Society was composed of Fellows and Associates, each Associate having the right to send in one picture without submitting it to the Committee of Inspection. Fellows were empowered to send in six works of art of any kind, without their passing inspection. On the other hand,



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medals and awards of all kinds were suppressed. Meissonnier was the first President of the Society, and the Vice-Presidents were the Presidents of the various Sections. Rodin succeeded Dalou in 1893 as President of the Section of Sculpture, so that he has since been *de officio* Vice-President of the Society.



## CHAPTER VI

### THE BUSTS

RODIN'S series of busts extends almost without a break throughout his career. In this branch of his art he reached greatness from the very first with his "Man with the Broken Nose" ("Homme au Nez cassé"), and the greatness has been, on the whole, uniformly maintained. If the busts executed in the period between his return to Paris and the year 1890 seem to rank higher than others of a later date, the prominence is caused by their number and the celebrity of some of the men portrayed, not by an inequality of workmanship. In all there is a realisation of individuality carried to the utmost, and, in all, the sculptor succeeds in exhibiting the degree and kind of soul that animates the features. What evidently contributes to make his "counterfeit presentment" so life-like is the absence of flattery. Everything that exists in the face of flesh is found again in the marble or bronze, not only copied but interpreted, and the sculptural effect exactly replies to the personal one. There is, of course, the artist's secret, which no analysis can altogether explain; the sources of a man's power are not clearly understood by himself, much less by his fellows. Why Rodin should put into a portrait such fulness of soul, and certain of his brother sculptors such dearth, depends upon something besides a trick of the fingers or even his observation; but, failing further penetration, it is the latter we must be content to remark.

In one example, at least, that of Victor Hugo, a record has been preserved by third persons of the infinite pains

## The Busts

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taken by the sculptor to fill himself with his subject. It was in 1883, and Victor Hugo, old and verging on the grave, cared little to be a study for painter or sculptor. Introduced to him by a mutual friend, a journalist, Monsieur Bazire, a correspondence preceded the famous interviews. One of the letters written by Rodin was the following :—

“DEAR AND ILLUSTRIOUS MASTER,—“ I apologise for my insisting, but the ambition to be the one who shall have made the Victor Hugo bust of my generation is so natural that you will not reproach me. Moreover, my desire, as I have already told you, is to be ready for Mademoiselle Jeanne’s birthday. By beginning now, I shall manage it. Allow me, therefore, to count on a moment you will grant me from time to time. I shall not abuse your kindness or cause you any fatigue, and the bust will get finished without your perceiving it. I remain, dear and illustrious master, respectfully yours.”

There was a good deal of vacillation on the old poet and novelist’s side, and a good deal of manœuvring on the side of the sculptor’s friends in and out of the family, before the definite consent was given. At last, the matter was arranged. Rodin’s cousin, Monsieur Thurat, told the author that he was present at the meeting when Victor Hugo announced the fact. The sculptor and he were received in the library of the house close to the present Place Victor Hugo. The host stood by his bookcase and for some time said nothing, being lost in some inner dream. When he spoke, it was to propose that Rodin should come and lunch every day if he wished, and make what sketches he needed during the meal. As practically open table was kept, a guest or two more might sit down without being especially noticed. So this was the course adopted.

## The Life of Rodin

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No regular sittings were granted to the sculptor ; but he came and lunched for two or three months, not every day, but sometimes several days running, and obtained a series of sketches showing a large diversity in the pose and expression. An inconvenience was that Rodin could spare very little attention for the meal, being absorbed with his pencil and paper, and hurrying home as soon as he could escape to transfer his drawing to the block. The account given by the sculptor of the introduction and its consequences differs some little from that of his cousin, whom he does not remember to have accompanied him. The unwillingness of Victor Hugo to pose was partly due to his having already given about thirty sittings to a sculptor who had produced no good result, so that the old man was tired of the operation. The studies made by Rodin—it is the master who himself adds this information—were carried on not only at table, but at other visits, until at length an intimation was given that they had lasted long enough. The bust which was the principal outcome of the foregoing experiments did not satisfy the aged poet—or his household. It was not considered flattering enough. This is not an uncommon charge made against the master, as he confesses, and that is perhaps why more than one of his fair sitters has given him to understand in advance that she would like to look as advantageous as possible. “I will make you look as you are,” answered the sculptor kindly, and no doubt with the same benevolent smile that accompanies the story, which he tells against himself. The net results of these sittings were several busts of large and small size. One of the finest of them in marble was acquired by the town of Paris and placed in the Galliéra Museum. More recently it has been removed to the “Petit Palais” in the Champs Elysées. The drawings which had served for their execution, after being scattered here and there, were collected again by Monsieur Georges Hugo. It was from





BUST OF MADAME MORLA VICUÑA

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them that the dry-point engravings of the poet's head were made, one of which is noticed elsewhere.

In the Luxembourg, there are four specimens of bust portraiture by Rodin, two being those of women. The latter may be fairly considered types of distinct treatment. One of them is realistic, the original being a Madame Vicuña; the other, idealistic, and represents a former pupil of the sculptor, Mademoiselle Camille Claudel, a woman of great talent. Than the first it would be impossible to imagine anything nearer to the living charm of feminine beauty. There is warmth as well as life, and an atmosphere of enchantment round it, as though the atoms of the marble had grown by self-readjustment into the grace of throbbing flesh. And yet nothing is exaggerated, nothing is abnormal. The perfection consists in a number of details, any one of which alone might pass with but slight remark. The head is a trifle raised, thrown back, and inclined towards the left, expectant, and inviting caress. In accordance with the tender musing of the eyes, somewhat veiled, are the half smile of the full lips and the open nostrils. An evening dress allows the neck to be seen down to the bosom, where the rough block cuts off the chiselled form with a bunch of flowers clinging to the lower edges. The undulations of throat and breast are lissome, and the lines made by the shoulders, with the head and chin—lines embellished by the fringing dress—are such as it seems to be the sculptor's privilege to perceive and put into his statuary.

How many similar reproductions of women, each with peculiar psychic qualities looking through the eyes and revealed all over the physiognomy, can hardly be ascertained. Most women that he has thus transferred to marble or bronze prefer to keep their treasure apart from the common gaze. If the whole number could be assembled and compared, the workmanship of each might

# The Life of Rodin

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help to explain the others. Monsieur Léon Maillard mentions a small woman's bust that used to be in the studio of the Rue de l'Université; it was not concealed, but neither was it too much in evidence. Everybody that visited the studio paused to examine it, as if they had been drawn to it by a sort of magnetism. In addition to its having merits common to the master's other busts, there was a pose of the head bearing not on the shoulder, but outside of its support and beyond the body; this movement is frequent in women, but no sculptor before seemed to have noticed its claim to sculptural representation. Rodin was quick to see the seductiveness of this attitude, in which the familiar and unfamiliar were both present. The harmoniousness of the effect interested and pleased the spectator at once. It had not been obtained without effort. Those who were curious enough to ask questions learned that six or seven models had been made, every one with a different inflexion of the head. They were able even to see the preceding configurations, each distinct and charming, but not so perfect as the last.

The bust of Mdlle. Claudel is well named "*La Pensée*."<sup>1</sup> There is a deliberate suppression of the sensuous element, even to the hair. The face appears between the mob cap that hides the ears with its crimped curve, and the block of marble that rises to the nape of the neck and the chin, and has some fashion of resemblance to a body rough-hewn. The beauty of the features is less physical. The cheeks are thinner, the nose more masculine, the brow and chin squarer, the mouth firmer, though still delicately shaped. There is another attraction, however, the spirituality spread over the countenance and shining in the eyes—those unmistakably feminine. It is a spirituality of reflection and self-communion that has burned and refined the material into something more purely

<sup>1</sup> Thought.



BUST OF MDLLE. CLAUDEL—"LA PENSÉE," OR THOUGHT

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# The Busts

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lovely. In these two busts of the Luxembourg, therefore, Rodin has exhibited the outward and the inward aspects of woman's influence over man; he has done it potently, with equivalents that bring out the mysterious as well as the known side of them.

It is fitting to mention here the portraits he has sculptured of his wife. A first one dates back to about 1874. Again, in 1879, she figured in a bust of Bellona wearing a helmet, which her husband submitted, among other candidates, for the selection of a head representing the French Republic. He was not successful in the competition. His Bellona was not an exact portrait, but the resemblance to the original was quite recognisable. Later, Madame Rodin sat once more for her likeness, and a wonderful likeness it was. More than twenty years have passed since it was modelled; but it continues to be a faithful presentment. Visitors to the Museum at Meudon who know the sculptor's wife marvel that into the clay was put not only what the subject was but what the subject would be. "A little thin, this one cheek," says Rodin, forgetting that age, in well-preserved people, will often round the profile of a cheek; and this is about the only difference between the bust of the 'eighties and the original of to-day.

Among the feminine portraits, in plaster or marble, that are always to be found in one or another of the master's studios, not a few are those of American women. Rodin manages to catch their national no less than their individual characteristic traits. In our sisters from over the water he has found out the minute yet essential differences that distinguish them from those of the European continent, and has marked them with delight. The bust of Mrs Simpson, which was exhibited at the Salon of 1904, is a fine illustration of this rendering.

Unique among the feminine portraits is the bust of a woman with a hand raised in front of the face and half



# The Life of Rodin

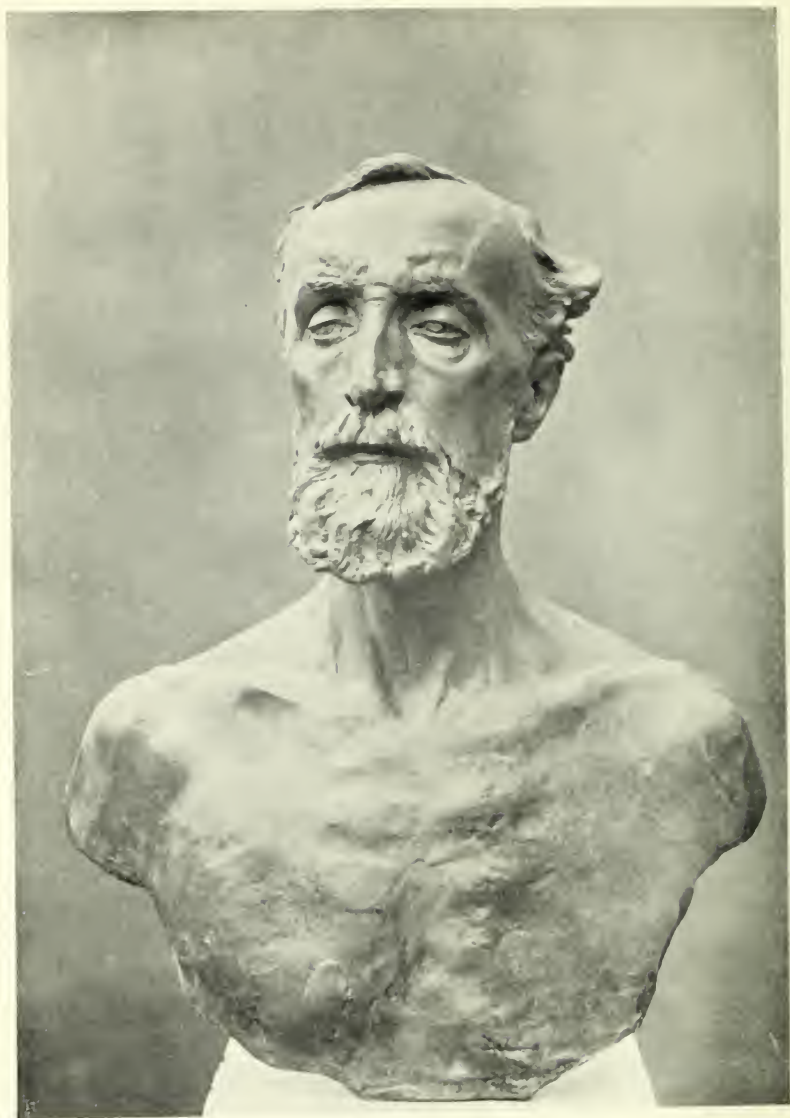
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hiding it. "I noticed this," the sculptor explains, "in a lady who turned her head aside on hearing a remark, and put up her hand to conceal a smile." The position of the hand and its shape (for Rodin makes hands quite as perfectly and characteristically as any other part of the body), combine with the bent poise of the head to produce a grace all the more striking as it is felt to be transient and of the moment.

The earlier men's busts comprised those of Jean-Paul Laurens, Carrier-Belleuse, Legros, Dalou, Henley, Henri Becque, and Antonin Proust. One thing in common they have, the interpretation of their inner construction by the artist's penetrative power; there is no caricature; instead, we have a representative expression secured by a sympathetic reading of the face; and in it there is an exact indication of the intellectual and moral qualities. If in the modern Rodinian plastic matter one tries to discover points of contact with older statuary, it is Donatello's or Verrochio's effigies that occur to the mind. There is a similar solid building up, a like research of significant detail, and the same spiritual intensity.

In the bust of Dalou, it is the combative energy of the man that is prominent, coming out in the nervous carriage of the head, in the stern mouth, the dilated nostrils, the tension of the muscles. At this period, Rodin and Dalou were still friends. It was an incident connected with Victor Hugo's death, which first caused a coolness in their relations. The sculptor says nothing of it himself, but it is related by third persons that Paul Meurice had sent for him to take a cast of the dead poet's face. Rodin went, but met on the threshold Dalou, who had preceded him in the work. The definite rupture belongs to a later date and was partly due to Dalou's displacing a bust of Rodin, by Mdlle. Claudel, at the Exhibition to which it was sent. Of this latter circumstance, also, the sculptor relates nothing. It is others who speak for





BUST OF DALOU

# The Busts

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him, and attribute to Dalou the responsibility for the quarrel.

There is less emanative force in the head of Legros and more of the reflective ponderation of the thinker, with much of the seriousness. Apparently, Rodin has chosen the cast of features most usual in repose. Still, there is a glitter in the eyes, bespeaking large latent energy.

The bust of Henley was to have been accompanied by that of Stevenson, as appears from part of a letter Henley wrote on the 20th of February 1884. "I hope to see you this next May," he said, "as we agreed, for you to do my bust. When I left you in Paris, I had an idea; it was to get you to do the bust of my friend Louis Stevenson. I proposed it to his father and he was delighted; so I arranged that Stevenson should be in Paris with me and that you should model the two portraits at the same time. Unluckily, Stevenson has been dangerously ill, and I fear we must put off doing his till another moment." As a matter of fact, Stevenson never sat to Rodin, although he kept up relations with him until his own departure for the islands where he died. Henley's portrait was duly finished in bronze and sent off to his home at Shepherd's Bush. By allusions, playful or serious, in his after letters, Henley bore witness to the never-failing delight he received from the contemplation of it. "Since you made me live in bronze," was his manner of speaking; and all lovers of Stevenson must regret that no opportunity was found of doing him a similar service.

In 1885, came the head of Antonin Proust, Minister for Fine Arts; it was also in bronze, and was the sculptor's only contribution to the Salon of that year. To some extent, the original was aggrandised and ennobled, but within the limits of the natural. The piercing, hawk-like glance, the forehead and cheeks ploughed with the furrows of painful thought, the thin, worn mask of flesh, serving

# The Life of Rodin

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hardly for the purpose of the indomitable will—this latter demonstrated in its full power—all these are equally and separately visible and evident ; but the impressions unite without jar, so that it is the face as a whole which retains the attention.

Two men, Franck, the great musician, and Castagnary, the former Director of Fine Arts previously mentioned, have their effigies by Rodin above their tombs. Both busts were carved for exposal to the light and open air. From the face of César Franck, in the Montparnasse Cemetery, radiates what might be called an ecstasy of meditative melancholy, like that described by Milton in his "Il Penseroso." Such, in brief, was the man's life, fertile in musical harmonies, produced without ostentation. The head of Castagnary required a more complex rendering. There was the writer on art, the journalist, the politician to be done justice to. These contrasts are brought out with boldness, clearly manifested in the facial lines, and composing a many-sided personality.

From correspondence still extant, it appears that the proposal for Rochefort's bust was made well within the middle of the eighty to ninety decade, through the agency of the same Monsieur Bazire who had been the intermediary between Rodin and Victor Hugo. Monsieur Bazire at the time was connected with the *Intransigeant*, Rochefort's paper. A plaster model was exhibited at one of the small galleries in 1886, but the marble was not finished till 1892. For once, perhaps, Rodin read a soul too well, and put into a physiognomy more than its owner cared to have revealed. In one sense, the portrait is flattering, seeing that it neglects none of the potentialities of the original, but the bad are shown no less than the good. In the vastly developed forehead and brows, in the fierce but shifty eyes, in the hard, cruel mouth, in the curious poise of the head leaning over at the apex and







BUST OF ROCHEFORT

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# The Busts

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drawn in at the chin, can be guessed the enormous but destructive intellectual activity, noisy and unprofitable, which has filled the career of this revolutionary pamphleteer and journalist who has always been "agin the government," whatever it may have been. In the expression, too, there are traces of the souring of the springs of feeling, which has come from so persistent and systematic a disparagement of persons and things. Above all, the enigma of the man's nature is there. During his life, Rochefort has puzzled his friends as much as his enemies. The note of interrogation is not the least merit in Rodin's portrait of him. When the Belgian sculptor Vincotte saw the plaster model of Rochefort's bust, he expressed his astonishment that nowhere was it possible to detect the finger-marks of the modeller. Some one explained to him that it was because Rodin washed his clay: "He must be extraordinarily sure of his work to dare to do that," was the comment.

In the same year of 1892, the marble bust of Puvis de Chavannes was exhibited at the Salon of the Champ de Mars; the plaster bust had appeared already in the previous year. A bronze reproduction was bought by the State two or three years later and placed in the Luxembourg Museum. The original marble is now in the Town Museum of Amiens. Among so many portraits that are excellent, it is almost invidious to select one and give it the palm; but if it were necessary to choose, that of the great painter of the childhood and life of St Geneviève would be the one. What is resplendent in the face is the indefatigable struggle of the worker, and the enjoyment of the mind's victory over matter. There is great insistence on the details of facial conformation. Each wrinkle, line, and depression are rendered with all their meaning; but across the whole is shed an irradiation of moral strength and serenity that transfigures it. To model such a head must have been

# The Life of Rodin

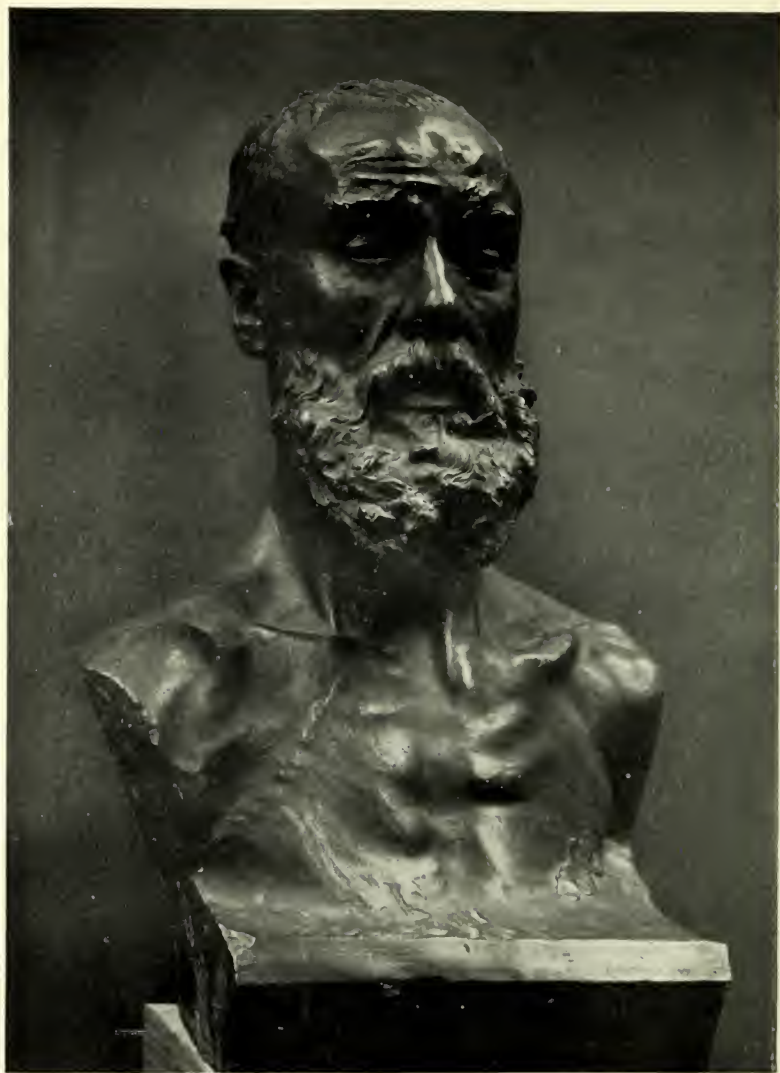
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an unalloyed pleasure. It is evident that the subject fired the sculptor.

The other man's-bust at the Luxembourg, that of Jean-Paul Laurens, also in bronze, was a tribute to friendship quite as much as to the painter of such pictures as the "Deliverance of the Besieged in Carcassone," at the Luxembourg, and the "Death of St Geneviève," at the Pantheon. Although in different camps, for Laurens belongs to the Academy which has outlawed Rodin, the two artists have always been on the best of terms, understanding each other's character, and each respecting what the other has done. Writing in 1900 to Arsène Alexandre, the art critic, Laurens said: "You know my admiration for the great sculptor. He is of the race of those who walk alone, of those who are unceasingly attacked, but whom nothing can hurt. His procession of marble and bronze creations will always suffice to defend him. He may rely on them." Laurens' head was exhibited at the 1882 Salon, together with the terracotta bust of Carrier-Belleuse. The portrait is singularly Greek. Without a name, it might be taken for one of the ancient sages, whose lineaments, marked with lofty speculation and the seer's insight into phenomena, express detachment from the world's vanities but sympathy with the world's pain. Beneath the moustache and beard, and in spite of their concealment, there is a line of mouth that bespeaks gentle tolerance of human weakness and folly. The English papers spoke in very high terms of this performance. One critic wrote: "His bronze portrait of the veteran painter is a masterpiece of art, combining the most unflinching truth with an envelope of style that gives it Homeric dignity." The praise has all the flavour of modern eulogiums. The head of Falguière, who was Rodin's competitor on more than one occasion, notably in the Balzac affair, is a much later contribution to this category, being exhibited only







BUST OF J. P. LAURENS

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# The Busts

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at the 1899 Salon. Equal to its predecessors in the faithful portrayal of individual idiosyncrasy, there is less revelation in it of spiritual activity, perhaps because of the disease which, when the bust was being made, had already begun to undermine Falguière's health, and which killed him not long after. Especially noticeable in this portrait is the realism of each detail, that of the nose being wonderfully elaborated.

With the bust of Octave Mirbeau, the sculptor attempted something unusual in this kind. After modelling it full face as a study, he ultimately placed it side face, with very high relief, in a block of marble curving round in front of the features, so that the eyes look at what appears to be either a newspaper or a piece of drapery. The effect is to soften the hardness of the profile, which was what was probably aimed at. The finished head did not go to the Salon until 1895, but the first model was made six years earlier.

In speaking of the earlier busts, that of Henri Becque, the dramatist, was mentioned. It was evidently one of those that pleased Rodin most, since he made a <sup>1</sup>dry-point engraving of the same subject. A small reproduction, a few inches high, exists in the museum at Meudon. This miniature, if a hackneyed expression may be used with its full meaning, is a perfect gem. Not even the engraving can convey the vivid animation of the physiognomy.

And the series continues. To-day Rodin is compelled to execute busts whether he will or no; and, as long as the cunning right hand can hold and knead the clay, people of public and private rank and of various lands will continue to seek from him what immortality a bust can confer. Formerly, he was glad to sell a copy of the "Man with the Broken Nose" for two or three hundred francs. To-day, those who come to him are glad to pay many thousands.

<sup>1</sup> See next chapter.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE DRAWINGS AND DRY-POINT ENGRAVINGS

RODIN'S drawings are an integral part of his sculpture, and throw a side light on the stages of its evolution. The handling of the clay, the transformations it undergoes before assuming a sculptural form, all this is illustrated by the drawings, which, however, have nothing of the photograph about them; they show what the sculptor is going to do rather than what he has done.

In his busy existence, they have filled up intervals which other men would devote to personal amusement. To him they have doubtless been a recreation; but, whereas ordinary amusement is distinct and separate from the labour it is designed to relieve, this recreation is in constant and intimate relation with the labour of the artist. Its intentional subordination to the main purpose of life is demonstrated by the fact that Rodin, with gifts that would have allowed him to attain eminence as a painter or an engraver, has rarely made incursions into these domains of art for their own sakes. While other artists have sought to emulate Michael Angelo and Leonardo da Vinci in their double talent, he has consistently restricted himself to striving for supremacy in the one.

There are many sculptors who do not draw, or who, at any rate, know little enough about it to justify the disdain that some painters profess for the performance of those that do. Such sculptors cannot be thoroughly acquainted with their own art. If they are not capable of shaping curves in one plane, they will be unable to shape them in

# Drawings and Engravings

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two or more. All great sculptors have been skilful with their pencil, and most of their drawings possess distinguishing merits apart from the utilitarian purpose they serve. Here, too, therefore, Rodin is in agreement with sound tradition. Carpeaux and Barye, his immediate predecessors, with their sketches evoke a similar admiration and wonder.

As the drawings of painter and sculptor are undertaken with distinct aims, so the method and manner of each will be different. What chiefly interests the latter is the enveloping line, the general silhouette of a body in the atmosphere. He has to draw as though moving round what he is delineating; and his drawing should bear turning on its own axis—should be, indeed, a delineation of this revolving movement. All Rodin's designs that are intended to help him in fashioning the undulations of his modelling, have this fluidity to-day, and have it in perfection. Looked at in their latest phase, these simple pencilled outlines cannot be well understood, unless the spectator has some knowledge of what has gone before. It is important biographically as well as critically to notice the manner of the student and to trace its successive developments.

Nearly all the early specimens of Rodin's drawing have perished. There is, however, one extant which carried off a first prize at the drawing school, and bears an inscription mentioning that it was done whilst the pupil was in the class of Lecoq de Boisbaudran. It represents the back view of a man, and, while indicating firmness and correctness of execution, reveals no qualities that could be called extraordinary. During twenty years, the only changes that occurred in the productions of pencil or brush were those naturally caused by the sculptor's training, for instance, a steady tendency to accentuate surfaces. With but few exceptions, the charcoal crayon was used for sketching, no doubt because it permitted greater rapidity.



# The Life of Rodin

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The second manner was something totally different from the first. In it, all semblance of painting or drawing as practised by experts has vanished. The amateur who comes across examples of it, having had no previous acquaintance with anything of the kind, feels a bewilderment comparable to that aroused by the perusal of certain of Blake's poems. Only after gazing at them from various points of view, almost as one would walk round a statue, is the object of the designer made clear, and, at the same time, the intrinsic merit of the design. Fortunately for the appreciation of this part of Rodin's work, a valuable album containing one hundred and twenty-nine plates, with an aggregate of one hundred and forty-two drawings reproduced from the originals by helio-engraving, was published in 1897 by Messrs Goupil, on the initiative of a Parisian art amateur, Monsieur Fenaille, who conceived the happy idea of doing for these studies of Rodin what Messrs de Chennevières and De Goncourt had done for the *cahiers*<sup>1</sup> of Watteau.

Summarily described, the drawings of the second manner are instantaneous visions of the model, which the artist almost as instantaneously fixes on the paper, without losing sight of what he is copying. His aim is to obtain a true image of a movement in its continuous aspects, and to note the image by a contour of the body set down with a circling flash of the crayon. Next, he gives the plastic conformation by a series of rapid daubs with the brush in divers shades. Both design and colour are peculiarly those of the sculptor, the distribution of light and shadow locating surfaces that correspond in the statue. In many drawings the illumination is quite weird, and the colours are chosen in accordance with the subject. As the majority were studies for the "Porte de l'Enfer," they mostly express sentiments of the tragic sort. "Ugolino," the devourer of his children, "Mahomet" with hang-

<sup>1</sup> Copy-books or note-books.







DRY-POINT ENGRAVING—SPRING  
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# Drawings and Engravings

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ing entrails, and others are represented in violent contrasts of sombre red and purple almost black that render the vision with lurid intensity.

Examined in detail, these drawings testify to the minute and painful researches the sculptor must have imposed on himself. One realises that, in the course of his modelling, he made a number of graphic representations of his subject with the materials chance placed at his disposal—ink, pencil, a hastily mixed colour, crushed whiting, black that he had ground with his thumb—the whole operation being dashed off in a moment, on the first piece of paper to hand, and that it was thus he checked and verified his plastic results. Among the hundreds of fly-leaves so utilised there were picked out afterwards those that pleased him most; and, in his leisure, he embellished them more carefully.

One which has become famous on account of its luminous vibration is known under the name of the "Homme au Taureau."<sup>1</sup> A cursory glance gives only the impression of a giant form, half man, half monster, extended across a black firmament in the upper portion of which glimmers faintly a thin crescent moon. The huge body, whose head and trunk are almost buried in the environing darkness, receives from the moon a beam that irradiates its right side, the brilliancy being greatest on the shoulder where the rays first impinge, and growing gradually less down the thigh and leg. One's eye is so fascinated by this phenomenal figure, which reclines between the horns of another crescent intersecting the entire oval of the picture, that it takes some time to perceive the bull to which the horns belong. Bathing in an obscurity slightly less than the background, the creature's head and neck, which are all that come into focus, yet glint with a thousand vague reflections from the right horn and from the illuminated portion of its rider. One eye, which

<sup>1</sup> "Man with the Bull."

# The Life of Rodin

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manifestly has no lustre of its own, is touched by the borrowed light ; the other seems a black ball on the grey of the socket. Fantastic as the subject is in the highest degree, there is not a single mark of the pencil or a touch of the brush that does not show the artist's exact observation of the effects of light and shadow. The symbolism might have been different, but the illustration would have been the same. The "*Homme au Taureau*" is an object-lesson, teaching that the sculptor should select for his statuary those surfaces and curves which, under the action of light, yield the clearest outlines. Further examples hardly less striking and instructive may be picked out almost at random. To select two only, "*The Two Centaurs*" and "*Prometheus with the Oceanides*," each illustrate the same science of the line, the same mastery of it, in representing muscular solidity and flexibility.

The sudden appearance of this style of drawing and design is largely to be accounted for by the dry-point engraving which Rodin first attempted while staying with his friend Legros, in London, in 1881. The latter, being part of the day absent from home and obliged to attend to his classes, advised his guest to occupy the time, which hung the more heavily on the latter's hands as he did not speak English, with something that would be fresh to him. Dry-point engraving differs from etching by being done with the graving tool on the surface of the copper and not on wax laid over the copper. The artist, consequently, uses no acid to eat out the exposed parts as in etching, and has not to trouble himself about the length of time which the etcher allows the acid to stay on one or another portion of the plate in order to produce the diverse tone-values. Still, in addition to his talent as a draughtsman, he needs precision, delicacy, and boldness—boldness, so as to furrow the metal with a sure and well-directed hand ; delicacy, so that the curves may be ploughed out neither

# Drawings and Engravings

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too deep nor too shallow ; precision, so that the whole may be clear as well as flexible. It is only with such requisites that intense and luminous proofs are obtained when the ink is applied. The process seems so simple that one might imagine it to be within the reach of any artist ; in reality, to succeed, there must be an equal training and co-operation of several artistic faculties rarely met with in one person.

Rodin quickly became proficient. Instead of a proper graving tool, he used an ordinary darning-needle fixed into a handle, finding that with it he could secure a lighter and more effective stroke. On his return to Paris, he continued to practise what he had learnt, both for the pleasure of the thing and for the aid it afforded him. If a subject was more than usually attractive, the engraving, like the drawing, received a more detailed treatment. The subject of his first experiment was a number of Cupids spinning on its axis the terrestrial globe, which was girt with a bandrol bearing the signs of the Zodiac. No hesitation is visible in the incisions, everything is clear and firm. A second plate contained scattered silhouettes of nude figures, men, women, and children. A third was a most delicately executed copy of his Bellona bust, already more independent of Legros' style and teaching. The next, "*Le Printemps*,"<sup>1</sup> is quite free from extraneous influence, and, together with its revelation of sensibility and tenderness in the artist, shows his progress towards effects of colour and light. The progress is further accentuated in the "*Ronde*," where a landscape is the frame of a dance performed by half-a-dozen nude figures, surrounded by spectators sitting or standing. Here the engraving begins to indicate an application to the sculptor's needs. Until 1901, these five plates were unknown to the public. It was owing to the entreaties of a friend, Monsieur Waltner, that

<sup>1</sup> Spring.



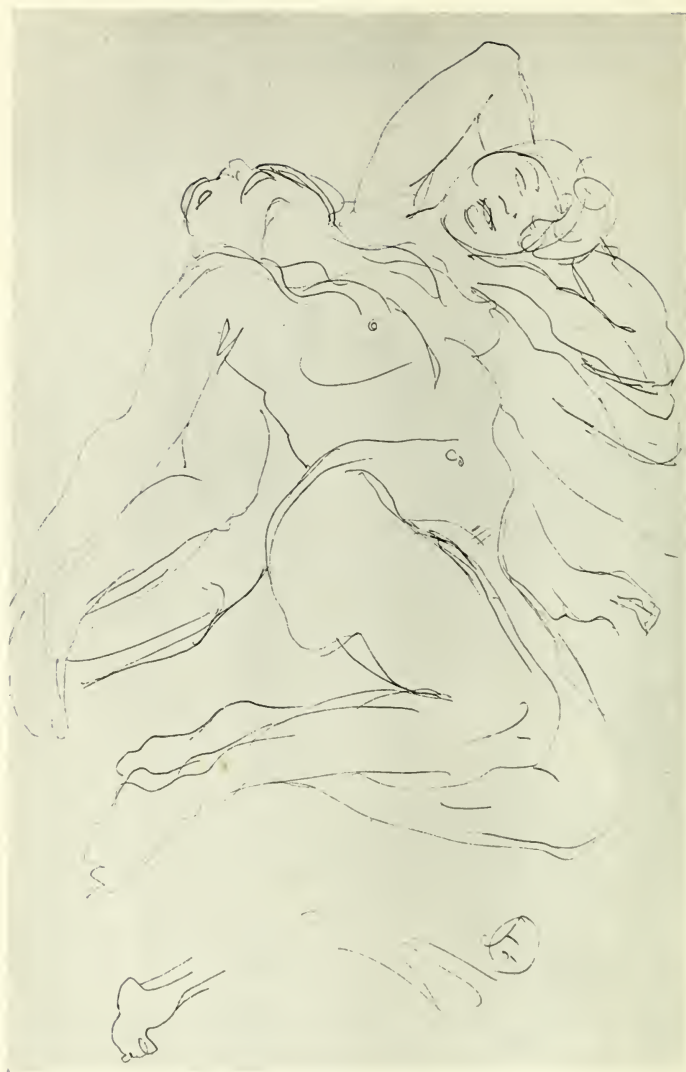
# The Life of Rodin

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Rodin was persuaded to exhibit them at the Salon of the "Société Nationale des Beaux Arts."

Great as is the interest and merit of these early dry-point engravings, they are necessarily thrown into the background by the portraits done between 1884 and 1886, and exhibited at the minor Salons of the "Peintres-graveurs" in 1889 and 1891. The importance of the latter in the sum total of Rodin's work can hardly be over-estimated. Some of the more highly finished plates are quite equal to etchings; for example, those of "Victor Hugo," "Henry Becque," and "Antonin Proust." The "Victor Hugo" is the best one to study if one wishes to realise what the juxtaposition of line upon line can do with no more resources than variation in the curve and pressure. A wonderful old man's head stands out on the background with ruffled hair and high, polished forehead, barred with two or three wrinkles in the lower part. Heavy brows contract over eyes that look out with a gaze of power and pensive melancholy. There is a slight flabbiness of cheeks, the sign of age, which the white beard and moustache confirm. The mouth, however, has lost none of the firmness of manhood in its prime. There are nearly a dozen gradations of thickness in the lines of the nose, some to bring out the relief, others to indicate its tendency to the aquiline, and there are nearly a dozen more to express the deep orbits and the eye-balls that gleam within them. To say the aspect is sculptural is an extra praise, since there is a lifelikeness produced by modelling in two-dimensioned space instead of three. A similar sculptural effect exists in the "Antonin Proust," which is a profile. When printed in warm sepia, it looks like a bronze medallion. The "Henry Becque" is less finished in detail, but is especially interesting as exhibiting in the same engraving the front and two side views of the face. Each view naturally offers a variation of appearance caused by the different angle





RAPID DRAWING FROM LIFE

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# Drawings and Engravings

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of vision ; yet the identity of feature is exactly preserved. The three touch, and it is as if the spectator were walking round the head, observing the changes. Referring to the preceding examples of Rodin's dry-point engraving, Roger Marx says : " They are unprecedented and unrivalled as regards living accent and their astonishing truth of relief ; they are portraits in which the stroke seems to search out the chisellings of a bust and to play in glittering reflections over the smooth surface of the marble."

In the third and latest manner of Rodin, the subordination of the drawing to the sculptor's art is unreserved and complete. The outline has become everything. He pursues the perpetual change of curve, and endeavours to seize it as it arises under the afflux of blood and muscular activity. The innumerable minute modifications in the contour of the body, incessant and always new, he has registered, if not all—a life-time would not suffice for this—yet more than any previous sculptor. It is a work that he returns to periodically, as the desire and need make themselves felt ; and then portfolios are rapidly filled with these sketches taken from the living model studied as an outline. Occasionally, while his eye has been fixed on the object and his hand has been gliding over the paper, unwatched and, for the purpose aimed at, wanting no surveillance, so skilled is it in its obedience, the edge of the paper is reached and part of a limb is cut off. Deformations of certain parts must happen to some extent, but the essentials are invariably obtained. When more than the enveloping line is attempted, there are often what might be called whipped strokes that indicate a surface. Their production is practically instantaneous, and one of the strokes, sometimes two or three, will be seen to be superfluous ; still, the proper ones which accompany these are never injured or lost ; both for position and clearness they are just where and what they should be. The outline sketches are

# The Life of Rodin

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generally coloured with a uniform wash of burnt sienna—more rarely another tint, yellow or blue, is employed—which gives unity to the contours, and renders the intention of each drawing more visible. It would be impossible to describe in detail the poses and attitudes, lasting only a few seconds, that these figures represent—equipoises of the body standing or lying, prone or prostrate, stooping or bending back. As the models are mostly women, much of this would be obscene, if the idea were obscene. On the contrary, the abstract design is so evident that no mistake can be made. Mr Arthur Symons, in the *Fortnightly Review* of June 1902, gives one of the best impressions that can be conveyed of Rodin's work in this kind. He says: "Not even the Japanese have simplified drawing to this illuminating scrawl of four lines, enclosing the whole mystery of the flesh. Each drawing indicates, as if in the rough block of stone, a single violent movement. Here a woman faces you, her legs thrown above her head; here she faces you with her legs thrust out before her, the soles of the feet seen close and gigantic. She squats like a toad, she stretches herself like a cat, she stands rigid, she lies abandoned. Every movement of her body is seen at an expressive moment. She turns upon herself in a hundred attitudes, turning always upon the central pivot of the sex, which emphasises itself with a fantastic and frightful monotony. The face is but just indicated, a face of wood, like a savage idol; and the body has rarely any of that elegance, seductiveness, and shivering delicacy of life which we find in the marble. It is a machine in movement, a monstrous, devastating machine, working mechanically, and possessed by the one rage of the animal. It is hideous, overpowering, and it has the beauty of all supreme energy."

In the last three sentences, perhaps, there is too strong an intrusion of the critic's personal taste; but he is quite



# Drawings and Engravings

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exact as to the character of the drawings. What the sculptor looks at in the feminine nude that he deals with is not its erotic side; he seeks a fresh movement, which he may add to the infinite beauty of form. Art indisputably gains much by the delineation of so many natural postures which no one has hitherto dared, or been able to record with the same fidelity and yet the same absence of sensual suggestion. Had the artist imposed on his living models a reserve contrary to his habit or practised eliminations that certain tastes might prefer, the gain would, in all probability, have been less. It is by remarking every location of the body in space, and by disdaining none, that he has known how to be constantly original. On account of their reduction to the line, and of their celerity of execution, the drawings of the third manner have been compared to the shorthand notes of a writer. The comparison is not a very exact one, since, besides being symbols, they have their own æsthetic qualities. It would be more correct to call them sculptural analyses made by a man profoundly versed in the harmonic structure of the body, which he resolves into its elements, so as the better to recognise the value of each of them in a composition, and give it its due place and significance. In such delineations as the sculptor has gone over again more carefully, in order to bring out the minute sinuosities of the curves, he seems to have drawn by the aid of an eye of multiplied facets, perceiving even the finest of them, which under a usual focus are hidden and lost. The grace of these is that of the fairest flower.

The few experiments with his pencil made by Rodin in recent years, apart from his statuary, have been concessions to friendship. He has illustrated the "Enguerrande," a poem of Emile Bergerat; supplied a prelude to the "Jardin des Supplices"<sup>1</sup> of Octave Mirbeau; and orna-

<sup>1</sup> "Garden of Torture."

# The Life of Rodin

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mented a copy of the "Fleurs du Mal"<sup>1</sup> of Baudelaire, which last is in the possession of Monsieur Paul Gallimard, and may be considered as a thing unique in its kind. In the designs, the whole gamut of tones is touched, from the vaguest image to the sharpest and most intense limning; and, in the subjects, the emotion is just as varied, the main theme being that of love and death, with their drawn-out agony of desires, sighs, sobs, and spasms. Baudelaire is an author that Rodin has much read; and, in spite of his robust temperament and artistic optimism, he has always been attracted by the poet's melancholy. His own painful experience may be partly responsible for it; but the penumbral presence of a similar melancholy in his own work from the very beginning shows that there is some affinity of nature between the two men.

In fine, whether the contributions to friendship are regarded, or the more technical pictorial designs, they both afford glimpses into the artist's tastes, sentiments, and character. His passionate admiration of feminine loveliness, his abiding consciousness of life's mystery, his tenacity of purpose, are there for every one to see. There is much besides, which becomes manifest when one is familiar with his thought. The thought is a catalogue with comment of the pictures, and they in return make the thought more luminous and comprehensible. It is thus especially that they have an assigned place in the biography.

<sup>1</sup> "Flowers of Evil."



RAPID DRAWING FROM LIFE

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## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MAGNUM OPUS

"I HOPE that the large Door about which we talked for a moment is getting on all right and as you wish," Henley said in a letter dated the 23rd of November 1881. The door referred to was the immense "Porte de l'Enfer" (Hell Gate), with its two leaves, which Rodin was commissioned in 1880 to execute in bronze. When Monsieur Turquet gave the order, he told the sculptor that he wished to have an ornamental door for the proposed "Palace of Decorative Arts," and he asked him his opinion as to the kind of ornamentation to be employed. "Could you make me a suggestion?" said the Minister. "Well," replied Rodin with a sly smile and a touch of irony, "I can tell you that I will cover the door with a lot of little figures, and then no one will be able to accuse me of moulding from the living body."

The idea of fashioning his Door to represent the Gate of Hell was largely due to his visit to Italy in 1875. The fifteenth-century Papacy of Leo X., the struggles of Ghibelline and Guelf, the history of the Medici family, and much more of the turbulent Italian life in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, had deeply impressed his mind while he was on the spots where the events had occurred; and, when he came after to read Dante, there arose within him the desire to select from the scenes called up by the genius of the Florentine poet some group or groups for plastic treatment. Monsieur Turquet's proposal was a godsend. It enabled him at once to fix his choice, so that under these auspices the work was begun.



# The Life of Rodin

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To-day, although twenty-six years have elapsed, the "Porte de l'Enfer" is still undelivered, and remains in the studio of the Rue de l'Université—parts also in the museum at Meudon—in a materially unfinished state. A good deal has been said and written as to the causes of this long delay. One explanation is that the "Palace of Decorative Arts," for which it is intended, is not yet built, the objects to fill the Palace meanwhile finding a temporary home at the Louvre. As far as it goes, this explanation is correct. No doubt, if the structure had been completed, Rodin would have been obliged to furnish his Door; especially as in 1886 Monsieur Turquet paid him 35,000 francs<sup>1</sup> towards the expenses of its production. This sum, of course, represents only a small part of the outlay made by the sculptor—both of time and cash—upon this great work, but the acceptance of earnest-money nevertheless bound him. As, however, the Government has never pressed him, he has kept by him his "Magnum Opus," indulging for once to his heart's content the artist's natural disinclination to part with the creature of his hands.

Another reason, abundantly exemplified in his other masterpieces, is that while working swiftly he elaborates slowly, because he is never entirely satisfied with what he has done, and is incessantly tempted to modify it. This is a conception of art common to Rodin and not a few of the old painters, who used to put on their canvases *pingebat*, the imperfect, "was painting," not *pinxit*, the past definite, "painted," when recording that a certain picture had been produced by them in such a year. They could not allow that the true artist should ever think of anything as finished beyond the possibility of improvement. The "Porte de l'Enfer" is an illustration of the tendency carried to its extreme limit. In literature there

<sup>1</sup> It appears from more exact information that only 25,000 have been, up to the present, handed over to the sculptor.

# The Magnum Opus

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are analogous cases—for instance, Wordsworth with his “Prelude to the Excursion,” and Goethe with his “Faust.” “I wish Rodin would give us his ‘Porte de l’Enfer,’” says Roger Marx. “It is a matter of great regret to me that he does not. My opinion is that he has worked at it too much, has put too much in it, has overloaded it, in fact, with figures, and, if I may venture to say so, has here gone beyond his architectural construction. The Door has been virtually finished for some time. It is a pity he does not acknowledge it.” If this accusation were very seriously meant, it would be a grave one, coming from a critic of such competence; but it is not, it is a little friendly reproach, voicing rather what it fears others may say than the fixed and fundamental opinion of Monsieur Marx, whose eulogiums of the “Bourgeois de Calais” and the “Claude Lorrain” testify to Rodin’s constructive power. It is true that a great deal has been put into the Door, but a great deal has also been taken out. During the whole of the period between 1880 and the present, the sculptor has been making experiments of composition on it. Probably, not once only but several times, the results obtained might have justified another artist in saying that further improvement there could not be, but with Rodin perfectibility goes into the infinite.

This prolonged inceptive state of the Door and the alternative addition and withdrawal of figures has, now and again, suggested an independent treatment of some subordinate part, which, after existing only in relation to the mass, has been reproduced in modified form for its own sake. Thus, for example, in 1904, at the Salon, there was a gigantic bronze statue of a nude man sitting bowed with his right arm resting on his left knee, the hand supporting the chin, and his left arm hanging listlessly over the same knee. It was called the “Thinker.” A better name would have been the “Contemplator.” In the “Hell Gate,” this figure appears in smaller and appropriate

# The Life of Rodin

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size on the upper cross-beam, looking down on the scenes of human passion and woe extended below him. Of no particular epoch or race, he typifies the endurance of man in suffering throughout the ages, and gazes with bitter reflection on the problem of life unsolved and seemingly unsolvable. If, in the enlarged and isolated figure, the idea loses some of its particular reference, it gains in grandeur. On account of the vast proportions, the muscularity of the man is intruded on the notice, causing the profane to scoff and to query why a thinker needs such brawn. "A fine brute!" pronounce some of that ilk, "but no thinker." From a juster point of view, the splendid build of the body and its muscular strength are intentionally contrasted with the mental passivity and gloom, and yield a more striking "vanity of vanities, all is vanity," than could be obtained by any exhibition of decrepitude.<sup>1</sup>

The Door itself is six metres high, and consists of a projecting framework surmounted by a pediment. The two leaves, which stand back from the frame and within it, as the canvas in a picture, are freely adorned with compositions joined one to the other by an infernal atmosphere of bubbling vapours. On the summit of the pediment are three stalwart male figures clasping each other in attitudes of mutual support, and of endeavour to avoid the destiny which is dragging them to their doom in spite of their straining co-operation. They give significance and intensity to what is beneath, but the synthesis is supplied by the "Thinker." He it is that unites and dominates the scenes of melancholy and despair shown on the uprights and the panels they enclose.

At one time the sculptor proposed to place an "Adam" and "Eve" on either side of the Door and in front, and the intention has never been altogether abandoned; but certain technical difficulties connected with the execution

<sup>1</sup> This statue has been purchased by public subscription and presented to the city of Paris. It now stands on the "Place du Panthéon."

# The Magnum Opus

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of the steps leading to the Door in the studio, on account of its insufficient height of ceiling, have kept this project in the background. The "Adam" is better known under its other title of "The Creation of Man," and has already been mentioned. The "Eve" was first exhibited at the 1882 Salon, where it was not much remarked. Subsequently, its admirable qualities were done justice to, alike in the original bronze and in a marble reproduction, the latter at present belonging to a Parisian amateur, Monsieur Henri Vever. The sculptor has represented the traditional first woman standing with the weight of her body supported on the right leg, while the left foot, resting on a stone, raises the left leg slightly in a pose of shamefastness that accords with the stoop of the shoulders, the bent-down head, and the arms crossed over the palpitating bosom. All the figure is seen to be stirred and thrilled with the presentiment of coming motherhood. This was the first full-length and full-size female statue that Rodin had put on public exhibition. Many others were to follow, yet without depriving it of its right to rank among the best. There was the same mastery of feminine physiology as he had shown of the masculine, the virile being transformed into soft melting grace.

The two stories in Dante which seem to have retained the firmest hold on his fancy are those of Paolo and Francesca, and of Ugolino. The pathos of the first has often inspired artists. Ingres in 1819, and Ary Scheffer in 1839, painted pictures inspired by the unhappy daughter of Guido da Polenta, who loved her handsome brother-in-law rather than her ill-favoured husband, Lanciotto da Rimini, and who perished by the latter's hand, together with her lover. In his fifth canto of the "Inferno," Dante relates how he met the guilty pair wandering in hell, and, struck by their appearance, questioned them. It was Francesca who replied, and,



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after making known their names and misfortune, said: "We were one day for pastime reading about Lancelot and how love seized upon him; we were alone and without suspicion. Several times the reading made us raise our eyes, and blanched our cheeks; but there was one passage that was our ruin. When we read how this tender lover kissed a smile on the adored mouth, he who shall never leave me tremblingly kissed me on the mouth. The book and he who wrote it were responsible. That day we read no more." Paolo and Francesca soon took their place among the types of tormented humanity on the "Hell Gate." Not content with one representation of them, the sculptor fashioned the group again and again, which led him to detach the subject and reconstitute it apart. As early as 1886, it existed under its present title in a small size. The larger reproduction which, as previously said, was bought by the State, did not appear at the Salon until 1898. Freed from its Dantesque origin and surroundings, the group lost its halo of guilt, and became simply two lovers embracing in the first transport of reciprocated affection. Both figures are nude, which gave the sculptor full scope for bringing into play all the resources of his art. And for once it happened that adversaries as well as friends had nothing but praise. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine anything of suaver charm—the man seated in his calm strength, with the woman in her voluptuous but chaste abandon by his side. Clingingly she hangs to him, her arms round his neck, while he timidly lays one hand upon her thigh to draw her nearer. Léon Maillard remarks that this hand quivers and throbs at the touch of the living body, while the other hand that holds the rocky seat is stiff and unresponsive. This, which would be unnoticed by the crowd, is one of the subtler, penetrative details of Rodin's workmanship which proves his close observation of nature and life.



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A variant on the same theme was the group completed in the same period and known as the "Eternel Printemps," sometimes also called "Cupid and Psyche," though this latter name is more generally applied to another piece of statuary. Larger and smaller reproductions have since been made, so that to-day there exist several marble specimens in different hands. In this group, the abandon of the woman, who is kneeling, is further accentuated. The man is still seated on a rock, but is posed in another way. The rock rises in the shape of a chair, which supports his left arm extended, whilst on his right reclines the body of his beloved. Her arms are raised to draw his head down to hers, as in the "Baiser," and, as in the "Baiser," a kiss is exchanged between them. The harmony of lines is identical in the two compositions. To assign a preference to either on any ground but one of sentiment might embarrass the severest critic. With more pertinency it may be said that in the "Eternel Printemps" the front view is so arranged as to offer an effect of bas-relief, yet an effect altogether Rodinesque, with a chiaroscuro of exceptional intensity. Except in the motive, therefore, we are back nearer to the "Hell Gate," where the original Paolo throws himself with a cry on to his Francesca, and the two tormented figures appear on the left leaf, below the group of Ugolino.

Ugolino himself is not far from the bottom of the leaf. He is represented crawling on all fours, in the last stage of weakness, with his son clinging to him, and his grandchildren lying near. Such a conception differs from the picture drawn by Dante in his third canto, where the fallen tyrant of Pisa is seen gnawing the head of his enemy and tormentor in life, Roger of Ubaldini, who shut him up in the tower to die. It differs also from a previous rough model of the subject by Rodin, which shows the tyrant sitting with his son on his knees, and a grandson standing beside him. This arrangement is

# The Life of Rodin

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more like that of the Ugolino group of Carpeaux, known to all lovers of statuary that visit Paris. In fact, there were several early attempts at a sculptural treatment of the subject, one of which dates from the visit to Italy in 1875. When Rodin returned to Paris in 1877, he brought with him a small-size model of Ugolino, which may be considered as the virtual commencement of the "Porte de l'Enfer." The group in its various developments and enlargements continues, even to-day, to attract him. In heroic size, the horror of the drama comes out more strongly; the emaciated frames of the tyrant and his family are modelled so as to present the ravages of slow starvation. In the principal victim, the open mouth, the hollow cheeks, the haggard looks, the kneeling position create a resemblance to some brute animal; which explains, no doubt, why Rodin has had some idea of again modifying his "Ugolino," and making him into a Nebuchadnezzar dwelling during his madness in the fields. These Dantesque subjects are only two or three of those that have grown out of, or been suggested by, the original theme. Some, besides, equally famous—the "Danaïd" and the "Orpheus and Eurydice," for instance, are drawn from its admixture with mythological inspiration. With the "Despair" and the "Lost Women," Baudelaire has more to do than Dante.

The general aspect of the Door is, of course, one of terror and desolation. In the themes, the whole gamut of emotion and passion is expressed plastically. From the bottom to the top of the Door, there is a sort of chronological progression. Down at the base, there are bands of centaurs and satyrs pursuing women under the impulse of sexual passion. Here, naturally, there is a corresponding accentuation of physical form. On the sides of the Door, the figures are in lower relief and more ethereal, but with a fine perfection of detail that recalls the decoration of the Sèvres vases. They supply an





UGOLINO AND HIS CHILDREN  
(see page 111)

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atmosphere to the central figures in which the plan is elaborated by the sculptor, whose skill, in forcing matter to a sculptural rhythm of movement, veritably triumphs in this vast field. There is a range which goes from the most violent contortions of the whole body to the scarcely perceptible quivering of the facial muscles. And yet there is no grotesque distortion of the human, no caricature; what is visible chiefly through the twisting and twining of all these supple forms, is the mental agitation. In his composition, Rodin has illustrated Milton's definition :—

“The mind is its own place, and in itself  
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”

His hell is not that of Dante, albeit Dante's pathos and more is found in it; still less is it like that of any one of the Tuscan painters whose pictures he had seen at Pisa and Florence, or like Michael Angelo's "Last Judgment" in the Sixtine Chapel at Rome. Such demons as he has imagined are within, not without, the forms that writhe under the influence of love and hate, unsatisfied and unsatisfiable.

The truth is that he has been carried far beyond even his own original conception. As he confesses, in all his imaginative productions, there is a development that results from the contact of his mind with its undertaking; and the end he only knows from a certain point whence he can see the convergence of all that has gone before. This point has, at length, been reached with the "Hell Gate." To-day, he realises exactly what of the vast outpouring of idea and the equally vast birth of forms must be retained and fixed as integral parts of the whole; and, when this whole is constituted, it will be possible better to understand the history of its evolution. Dante being the starting-point, it was natural the material arrangement should be in accordance with the traditional



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"Inferno," quite as much pagan as Christian, so that the various sections of the Door may be labelled. In the uppermost panel forming a frieze, below the architrave on which sits the "Thinker" or "Contemplator," the souls arrive in Charon's bark, and are judged by the stern Rhadamanthus or his successor. The long narrow panel of the jamb on the spectator's left hand, as he faces the door, is supposed to be the limbo of those who died without the Church's pale, men, women, and children, "unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd." The corresponding vertical panel on the right is the abode of those who perished victims to love, through divers causes that shut them out of Paradise; there are babes here also. On the two leaves, the sculptor's fancy refused to be bound by the legend; and, imagination mingling with fancy, an exuberant invention of subject covered the surface with materialised passions of every kind and intensity. Not even the projecting frames with beading and quirk could limit the production or position of these uneasy shades; they climbed over the edges, they clung to the cornice; any movement, any place, if only they might escape from sinking lower into the abyss. The varying relief of these figures adds to the intensity of the effect. It allows the sculptor to show simultaneously all the resources of which his art can dispose. Throughout the gradations, as in the contrasts, there is a science of composition which seems the more wonderful, the longer one studies its evidences.

In his "Vie Artistique," Gustave Geffroy thus tersely sums up the general aspect: "The giddy swirl and fall into space, and the trailing on the ground, of an entire and wretched humanity, yet bent on living and suffering, bruised and wounded in its flesh, saddened in its soul, proclaiming its pains, bitterly laughing in its tears, and intoning its breathless anxieties, its sickly enjoyments, its ecstasies of grief! Through a chaos of stones, on

# The Magnum Opus

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fiery backgrounds, bodies entwine, part, and rejoin; hands clutch as if to tear, mouths aspire as if to bite, women flee with swollen breasts and impatient desire or fall heart-broken, and bewailing the barren hope of greater pleasure desired and unfound. Admirable panels! In their frames will be for ever inscribed the carnal miseries and silent sacrifices of the love-lorn, the eagerly ambitious, the ideal-seekers, lamentable and cruel symbols of physiological fatalities, and the vain wishes of the mind."

The few groups or statues previously mentioned as having been detached from the Door by no means exhaust the list. Quite a number have sprung from this origin. Their names, for example, "Despair," or "Fugit Amor,"<sup>1</sup> will generally suffice to indicate the fact, or a glance at them, when that can be had. And what a wealth of material for more! Right up on the cornice, just underneath the three that tremble on the brink, there are some thirty heads, nothing but heads, extending in a line, close together, with a facial vivacity that is almost ghastly. Types of humanity, Jew and Gentile, they bear, each of them, a mark of that individuality of soul that so strikes one, when looking at a dense crowd of people from a short distance, with all the bodies in contact and only the features emerging. It is the portrait-gallery of his "Hell Gate," an attempt to combine analysis with synthesis, and especially an introduction to the drama beneath.

Seated before the massive structure that fills in nearly the whole of one wall in the principal studio of the Rue de l'Université, and allowing the gaze to wander over the undulating surfaces that surge and seethe and bubble and boil in places where emotion is at its fiercest, or sink to wan, wailing monotonies of duller feeling, one has a little of the awe experienced by the profane when

<sup>1</sup> "Love flies."

# The Life of Rodin

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first confronted with the half-opened arcana of science. Here it is the beauty of suffering, which one is disturbed to find so great in its proper plastic expression. A certain resentment even arises in the mind that the sculptor should have given grandeur to what common estimation regards with repugnance. But reflection suggests another standpoint—apparently the sculptor's—from which this rhythm of earth pain appears as a harmony of the universe.

Mainly on such grounds, the "Monument to Labour" may be called an epilogue to the *Magnum Opus*. As yet, it exists only as a model a few feet high, and dates back not more than five or six years. Erected in some spacious square—the Champ de Mars, for instance—where it might with advantage replace the Eiffel Tower, an elevation of a hundred yards would be possible. To execute it in a manner worthy of the sculptor and his genius, a band of skilled coadjutors would be necessary, not to speak of the material expenses in stone, marble, and bronze, so that a very large sum of money would have to be sunk in the undertaking. It is doubtful whether Rodin will live to see this project realised, which is, however, one of the most grandiose ever dreamed of by a sculptor. If achieved, even in more modest proportions, it would to some extent supersede the "Hell Gate," dealing, as it does, not only with the past history of man's toil, but with his hopes for the future.

The tower consists of a central shaft round which from base to summit is a winding staircase, and of an outer case pierced with a similarly winding sweep of arched unglazed windows succeeding to each other constantly, with the space only of a pillar to separate them. Thus the light is able to stream through on every side. On the scroll of the inside shaft, as it mounts, are represented in bas-relief the various stages of man's progress and redemption through work. At





PARTS OF THE FRAMEWORK OF THE HELL GATE

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the entrance are two allegorical figures of Night and Day, each with appropriate pose and gesture; and, on the top of the tower, where the shaft issues from the dome in which the outer case terminates, are two presiding genii. In the basement of the tower is a crypt, with an entrance on the opposite side to that above, showing the subterranean and subaqueous labours of the miner and diver. From here, the ascent in the industrial order is methodic: masons, carpenters, blacksmiths, joiners, potters, etc., clad in costumes indicative of the occupation rather than of a particular epoch. Each higher stage shows processes more and more freed from primitive material bondage, and attaining their results more and more through the activities of the mind. The idea, as the sculptor says in the inscription, has been to reproduce the hive and to combine it with the spiral—a fit emblem of man's evolution and growth. There are eight rounds above the crypt; and an outer circle of carving that crowns the edifice, where the central column leaves its sheath, makes a completing ninth. The two genii or Blessings at the summit are winged, female forms that poise lightly on a slender support in an attitude of protecting love. They are the only part of the monument which has been executed in larger size and in marble, and has appeared as a separate group.

Considering the two things together, the "Hell Gate" and the "Tower of Labour," the query arises as to whether it would not be congruous to put the former at the entrance to the crypt of the tower, in case the latter is erected. It is doubtful now that the door will be placed where it was intended, and a destination of some kind would be better than a museum. What could be more fitting than to make it the lower extremity from which the spiral of man's progress issues? It would symbolise the martyrdom of man, of which Winwood Reade once gave so graphic a statement. It would add beauty and

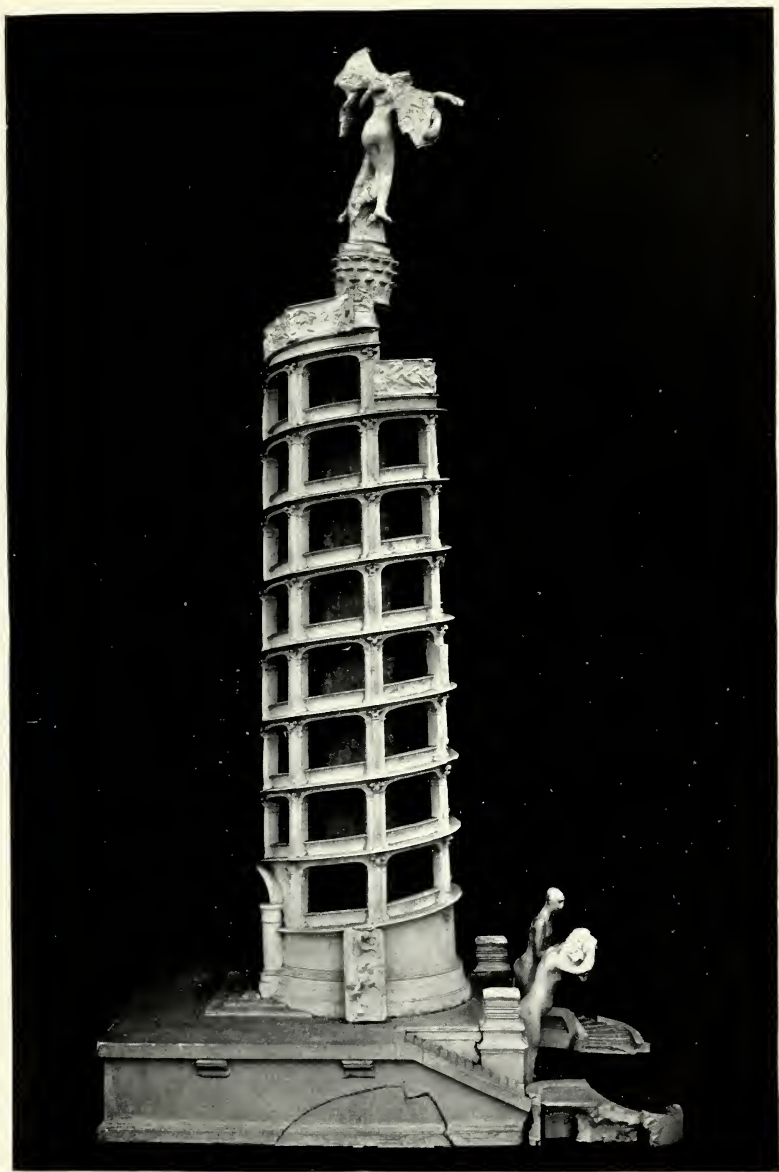
# The Life of Rodin

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intenser meaning to the sculptural representation of man's early strivings figured in the underground panels, and, by being linked to the idea of redemption of which the tower is the affirmation, it would establish coherence between the varied phases of the sculptor's statuary. It would also make the unity of its teaching more visible. Although the statuary is the outcome of moods, and, as such, shows diverse tendencies, there are none that contradict Rodin's meliorism of mind. Like Tennyson's verse, his carving sings :—

“ O yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill,  
To pangs of nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood.”

And these lines, or others like them, might replace the “ *Lasciate ogni speranza* ” over the door, while round the feet of the “ *Benedictions* ” might be written the burden of the poet's hope that nothing shall be wanting “ when God hath made the pile complete.”



THE TOWER OF LABOUR

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## CHAPTER IX

1890-1900

### THE DECADE OF THE 'NINETIES

IN the year 1890 Rodin abandoned Paris definitely as a place of residence and went to live in the country—not far away, however, it being necessary for him to come daily into the city, and the facilities for rapid transit between it and Paris being somewhat restricted. He chose Bellevue near Sèvres, which is close to the river, with a convenient boat service that enabled him to get to the Rue de l'Université, walking only a very short distance at either end. The house had been formerly occupied by the dramatic writer Scribe. It was not the prettiest in the village, nor yet one of the largest, though much more spacious than the flats he had been inhabiting in town. Any one caring to visit it will find it at No. 8 Chemin Scribe, the latter a narrow, winding lane that commences near the railway on the heights, and slopes down as it turns, until the broad road is reached that runs parallel to the river. The front of the building is almost opposite the landing-stage of Bas-Meudon ; and the best view is obtained from the upper river bank, where it is perceived to be a three-storied structure, on rising ground, with yellowish-white walls, and a number of green-shuttered windows, semi-circular at the top. The position, the trees, the garden, the fresh air, the proximity to woods and water, these were the recommendation to its new occupant, who spent the next four years of his life there, the attic floor and the large bedroom beneath it being used as a studio for



# The Life of Rodin

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quiet work at home. No. 8 is really composed of two dwellings distinct from each other, though in the same property. The Villa Scribe was the smaller. The old gardener of the larger dwelling, who acts as porter for the two, relates that he used to help the sculptor to carry his plaster figures up and down stairs, one being Balzac, not *the* Balzac, but an earlier model, probably the one of which a small reproduction may be seen in a case of the Meudon Museum. He tells, too, of his tenant's fondness for rambling off early in the morning before ordinary folks were up, to fill his lungs with woodland air and his vision with woodland sights. He tells again that Rodin cared more for what was outside the garden than in it, for wild nature rather than tamed, cultivated growths. Those who were familiarly received in this first country home remember how all over the upstairs rooms were littered small models, detached pieces of sculpture, here an antique head, there a fragment of Middle Ages architecture, elsewhere a Greek urn. Even now, there is a tendency to this overflow and intrusion of that which pleases, that which is the master's delight, into places from where they would be banished in an ordinary abode.

Almost simultaneously with his removal to this cottage, Rodin quitted his studio in the Boulevard de Vaugirard for another in the Boulevard d'Italie, No. 68, near to the southern fortifications of the city and the now covered-up stream of the Bièvre. The new premises were the ruins of what must have been, a century and a half before, a charming country *château* of Greek style, standing in its own grounds and composed of a main central structure porticoed in the lower story with two gabled wings. The left wing has disappeared owing to the cutting of a new street, and the remainder has become an old tumble-down, outwardly disreputable-looking building, with gaps and cracks in its boundary wall and palisades, and rank grass growing over the uncared-for garden. It is the





"CELLE QUI FUT HEAULMIÈRE," OR THE AGED HELMET-MAKER'S WIFE

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invasion of the city life which has destroyed it; recently, the sculptor has been obliged to leave it to its fate, for fear of having it come down over his head. When he took it, however, both outside and inside still possessed considerable attractiveness, the interior panelling and rich decoration, though decayed, furnishing an ideal setting for his statuary. "Clos Payen" was the name of this retreat which the master used as a studio for ten years. There ought to be some curious story to tell about its past.

As forming a link between the two decades, may be mentioned two productions, both figures of old women, which were finished rather before 1890, but were exhibited then, and which are undoubtedly conceived in a maturer manner, with rather less movement and rather more sculptural expression. One of these statuettes is to-day in the Luxembourg. A question naturally occurring to the mind, as one gazes at it, is who could have been the model for the "Vieille Heaulmière,"<sup>1</sup> or more properly "Celle qui fut heaulmière"? The answer is: An old Italian widow, very old, very poverty-stricken, and very thin, who had come to Paris to seek for a son whom she had not heard of for a long time. Reduced to straits, she was told to knock at Rodin's door, probably directed by some one of her fellow country people who had posed as a model. Her tale was listened to, and it was proposed she should sit. The sculptor had never had such a human wreck before him. She consented, gained a little sum of money, and contributed her share to the making of another masterpiece. It is woeful, and it is grand and awe-inspiring, this small bronze nude figure, exposing all the ravages that age and privation can inflict upon the fair outlines of the body. She sits with collapsed shoulders and drooping head, her gaunt left arm grasping the edge

<sup>1</sup> The subject of one of François Villon's poems. *Heaulmière* = helmet-maker or helmet-bearer's wife.

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of the seat to keep herself steady, while, with spread-out fingers, the right is held behind her back. The two legs clinging together are drawn in against the seat, as if to aid in maintaining the balance; and, from head to foot, the skin bags and wrinkles and hangs about the feeble shrunken muscles, hardening and sharpening the curves that ought to be soft and sweet. In conversation with the present writer, Roger Marx spoke of this statuette as being one of those which most strikingly demonstrates Rodin's being a continuer of French tradition. "Take a microscope," he added, "and examine any portion of the figure, and then compare the same with a portion of Pigalle's work, and they will be found absolutely alike, not because Rodin has imitated—he is too original for that—but because their principles and methods are the same." The second old woman is similar to the first, but she is lying on the ground. Misery and want have had their will. The worn-out body can do no more.

In his choice of the country as a permanent abode, health reasons and the desire to be nearer woods and nature were, as has been hinted, paramount with the master. But there was a motive less avowed which also threw its weight in the scale. In spite of himself, he had too much yielded in the latter half of the preceding period to the society invitations that assail celebrity; and, as he had worked hard at the same time, he had suffered a good deal from the fatigue of this double existence. Having no real taste for distractions of the sort, they had palled upon him as soon as the novelty was over. By going to live out of town, he was provided with a legitimate excuse for remaining at his own hearth mostly in the evenings, so that he could give himself more to friendship and less to the world. And friendship he needed as much as ever, perhaps more. The troubles he had gone through professionally up to then were small in comparison with those he bore the burden of, with scarcely any intermission,



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in the following ten years. In 1891 came a big disappointment about his "Victor Hugo";<sup>1</sup> and he had hardly recovered from it when, in 1892, there was the controversy concerning his "Claude Lorrain,"<sup>2</sup> which he felt keenly, notwithstanding his quiet stoicism; especially as it came at a moment when he had both obstacles and fears lying between him and the completion of his "Bourgeois de Calais."<sup>2</sup> A year or so more and a "Balzac"<sup>3</sup> affair happened, more disagreeable than the previous ones and fated to continue simmering until 1898, when it boiled up into a war of words that is hardly now allayed. Lastly, came the Sarmiento dispute,<sup>4</sup> which had not the same publicity, since the monument was erected in a far-away land, but which affected him all the same.

Luckily, he had not to bear the burden alone. In proportion as it became heavier and there was a renewal of attacks, his old supporters were reinforced by younger men who brought the fire of their youth and the freshness of their powers to his defence. Rodin may esteem himself happy in having this faculty of attracting men, who, once under the spell of his personality and imbued with the spirit of his sculpture, have fought his battles with an ardour and constancy almost unparalleled. Not to repeat names already spoken of at some length, those of Octave Mirbeau, Gustave Geffroy, and Camille Mauclair may claim to have been in the front rank, the men themselves to have been both henchmen and intimates of the sculptor during these years of strife.<sup>5</sup>

Mirbeau's incisive style and satiric qualities, added to his fine artistic discernment, made him a host alone. Between his notice in the *Revue Illustrée* of July 1889 and his "Ante Porcos" of the 15th of May 1898, in the *Journal*, he intervened again and again with trenchant

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xvii.    <sup>2</sup> See chapter x.    <sup>3</sup> See chapter xii.    <sup>4</sup> See chapter xiv.

<sup>5</sup> The art critic, Monsieur Roger Milès, has also a place among these militant enthusiasts.

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articles that left permanent traces in public opinion. Like Mirbeau, Geffroy was a disciple of the master while yet young. Introduced to Rodin by their common friend Bazire of the "Intransigeant," before he was quite thirty, he brought forth the fruits of his fertile observation in various editions of his "Vie Artistique," published between 1893 and 1900. Too hard a worker to frequent society circles, he knows more of the quiet hours spent with one or two kindred minds, when the sculptor's tongue, embarrassed amid the multitude, was untied and waxed eloquent. Maclair is a still younger contemporary, and one of the more recent recruits. His criticism inclining rather to analysis and detailed examination, seeking causes for the effects, is of the newer school. Its complements, in treating of Rodin's statuary, what Geffroy and Mirbeau have to say, and illustrates a standpoint equally interesting.

The Bellevue house was inhabited until 1894. It served its object very well while the sculptor was settling down to country habits; but it was not in the best situation, and it was only a rented property; and as, notwithstanding professional worries, his pecuniary position was improving, he looked round for a house that he might make his own in the neighbourhood. After some searching, he found what he wanted on the Paris side of the Val-Fleury at Meudon. It was nothing very grandiose, as will be seen when the description is given;<sup>1</sup> but it commanded a magnificent landscape, it was roomy, and it could be improved. The dream of a studio and other workshops within his grounds could be realised, if not immediately, in process of time, and other dreams, simple also, of making his retreat worthy of being a sculptor's home. All this has come about in the twelve years that have elapsed since the original purchase, but little by little, and leaving further ameliorations for future realising. Madame Rodin's

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xviii.





ILLUSION  
(see page 127)

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taste for housekeeping and her warm-hearted welcome of her husband's friends, to which the sculptor is fond of paying tribute, had henceforward fuller scope. The Paris acquaintance soon learnt the way to where he had set up his family gods. There were frequent gatherings at dinner, or a guest kept to lunch; and, if he entertained less indiscriminately than celebrities often do, his table was the nearer being a feast of reason and a flow of soul. New faces were seen at Meudon as well as the old. Jean Aicard,<sup>1</sup> Pierre Maël,<sup>2</sup> and Gustave Toudouze<sup>3</sup>—the last two recently dead—all three members of the "Société des Gens de Lettres" at the time of the "Balzac" affair, joined the band of friends. Maël was, until his death, of the inner circle whom the master sees most.

And then, established definitely in surroundings that he returned to with an increasing feeling of their being his preferred abode, he resumed his readings of a solid kind—for a time interrupted—old French classics, translations of the Latin and Greek authors, which in turn were his pillow-books, perused after going to bed, and furnishing material for reflection on the morrow. Pleasant interludes also to the usual occupations that filled his hours and days were the short stays in country-houses belonging to his friends, with Fritz Thaülow in Bretagne, with Octave Mirbeau at Poissy, with Fenaille in the old castle of the Rodez family, not to mention others who were proud to have him. And pleasant interludes, the trips, more occasional these, that he was able to make, now with Madame Rodin, now with one or two men companions, in order to get a change of air. One most enjoyable excursion was with his wife in 1892 down to the south of France, passing through Grenoble; another, likewise in the early 'nineties, with Gustave Geffroy and Carrière, to Guernsey and Jersey, where he saw Victor Hugo's house, and familiarised himself with the poet's rock of

<sup>1</sup> Poet and dramatist.

<sup>2</sup> Novelist.

<sup>3</sup> Novelist.



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exile, which he wished to bring into his monument to the author of the "Misérables," and the "Châtiments." Madame Besnard tells of the sculptor's accompanying her husband and herself in a carriage excursion to Berck-on-Sea, and of his delight when coming across some quaint piece of architecture or a bit of scenery with colour and curve of uncommon harmony. This mode of travelling is one that Rodin is peculiarly partial to. It allows him to digest his impressions.

The fecundity of production that had distinguished the previous decade, continued, not only unabated but augmented, in this one that carried the master on to his threescore years. The change in his style, or rather its ultimate development, alluded to in speaking of the "Heaulmière," as in his recorded conversations, became progressively accentuated. The monuments will be recognised as its clearest manifestation; but the slow elaboration is perhaps best studied in the many pieces of statuary executed for his pleasure and exhibited either at the annual Salon, or subsequently in 1900, when he submitted his works as an aggregate to the judgment of his contemporaries. In the first few collections of the New Salon, it was his busts that chiefly represented him. That of 1896 contained his "Illusion, daughter of Icarus." In 1897, a whole series appeared: the "Victor Hugo" group in plaster for the Luxembourg Gardens, the "Dream of Life," "Cupid and Psyche," a small group of the "Dream," the "Caryatide fallen underneath her Stone." Then came the famous year of the "Balzac" and the large-sized "Baiser"; and in 1899, a bronze, "Eve," another marble group, and two busts, one being Falguière's.

Of these, the "Illusion" and the "Caryatide" are eminently Rodinian. Both are figures of the most captivating sculptural loveliness, singing a dirge of mortality. In the first, the master accomplished a feat of extraordinary difficulty and boldness. He modelled

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his falling sprite at the moment when the tired pinions, after vainly endeavouring to maintain their owner's flight, were dragged down to earth, feebly beating the air. The contact of cheek and body with the ground is soft and gentle; the fair outlines of the limbs are uncrushed and uninjured; because there is the still upward lift of the quivering expanded wings, almost but not quite supporting the weight that hangs on them. Through this poetry of form and the pathos of its sentiment comes the surge of thought which never fails in Rodin's art. Evoked are all the contrasts of fact and fancy, the long and lofty soarings of hope, followed by the sudden lapse of the slower exhaustion by which the mind sinks from bliss to woe. The "Caryatide" is the counterpart of the "Illusion." It is the plaint of experience, the effort of labour strained to breaking-point, the patience of the will, the soul "cabin'd, cribb'd, confined" by its material envelope, and more—that one may read into the female figure of resignation bearing on her shoulder the mass of stone that tries her beyond what she can endure. Her trembling knees are obliged to yield. She has dropped to a sitting posture, striving meanwhile to keep her load in its place. Such a conception of the Caryatide, which was in general foreign to the serene and smiling representation of the Greeks, had already entered into modern art. Rodin, in continuing it, with his own peculiar expressiveness, gave a further example of his being in sympathy with the national tradition in its characteristic traits, and, what was better, with the spirit of the age in which he lives.

A pleasing picture of the busy hive where these masterpieces were turned out, and at the time when they were turned out, was drawn in an American paper from the account of an eye-witness.<sup>1</sup> "In one corner were half-a-dozen Italian models, engaged to come round in case the

<sup>1</sup> Philip Hale in the *Boston Commonwealth*.

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master should want them. In another part a couple of street musicians, a man with a harp and a fiddler, were playing airs of street songs, while across the studio sat Rodin watching every movement. He wanted to do some studies of musicians, and had these men play by the hour until he should satisfy himself as to just what pose, what subtle movement were those he would choose. Finally, in still another part of the studio, several students—rather say apprentices—were working away for dear life. Some were pointing up a big group of the master's; one was working on a study of her own. In the whole place was breathed the atmosphere of work—work under the pleasantest surroundings, to the music of harp and violin, but work all the same.”

At the Munich Exhibition of 1893, a second-class medal was awarded the master for a piece of his statuary that he had allowed to be shown there. This was not very encouraging, but he bore no grudge; and when a greater eagerness at length appeared in German art circles to see what he was doing, he gratified it just as if the honour had been all for himself. As in England, so across the Rhine, his fame was spread by the efforts of one or two lovers of his art. Herr Linde of Lübeck began to buy his masterpieces, and Count Kessler to write about them. Now both buyers and writers are numerous.

Though less frequently seen in soirées, there were times when he put in an appearance for the sake of meeting those it was almost impossible to see in his hours of employment. De Goncourt he continued to visit, as is proved by further entries in the Diary. One mention of him, dated the 23rd of July 1891, says: “Walking before dinner, Rodin spoke to me of his admiration for the Javanese dancing-women, and of the sketches he has made of them. He talked, also, of similar studies of a Japanese village transplanted to London, in which were



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seen Japanese women dancers. He finds our dances too jerky, too much of a hop, while these dances are a succession of movements engendering and producing a serpent-like undulation."

An entry, on the 16th of April 1893, throws light on the early days of the "Balzac": "Rodin complains of being this year without any go, of feeling washed out, of being under the influence of suppressed *grippe*. He has worked all the same, but has executed only things without importance." This physical weakness and prostration were no doubt one cause of the delay in fulfilling his contract.

Very significant is a paragraph jotted down on the 2nd of November 1894: "Yesterday Frantz Jourdain, speaking to me of his son, said to me that now in the studios everything is changed in the pose of the model, that it is no longer the balanced attitudes of Marius on the ruins of Minturnæ, but the tormented and twisted Michael Angelo nude figures of Rodin."

The last entry in the Diary is dated June 27th, 1895. Here De Goncourt remarks: "In the train, Rodin, whom I found really changed and very melancholy on account of his low state and the fatigue he felt from his work at the moment, complained almost distressingly of the vexations which in the painter's and sculptor's career are inflicted on artists by art committees, which, instead of helping them in their work, make them lose their time in solicitations and runnings-about, time which he would prefer to employ in engraving."

The testimony afforded by De Goncourt's Diary confirms what was stated above, viz., that the middle portion of the 'nineties was a time of great difficulty and trial for the master. In reality he was staking his reputation on a work of art which he knew to be a bolder departure from ordinary canons than he had hitherto ventured on. He consequently risked wider condemnation. Among

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his artist friends not a few were against him, and some told him so; and, in spite of his own conviction, this disapproval saddened him. Besides, as often happens when outward troubles arise, he had concurrently a series of worries of more personal and private order to contend with. It may be only conjecture, but it would seem, on examining the ceaseless production engaged in during this period—the quantity of which may even have been increased by his desire to lose himself in his work—that the majority of the pieces of sculpture betray the mood and feeling which prevailed during their execution, or at the moment of their inception.

If he had been a reader of English newspapers, he might have learned from an article published in a September issue of the *St James's Gazette* in 1896, that his troubles were only a passing cloud in his horoscope, his head being of the lucky lunar type frequent among artists and *savants*. "Messieurs Berthelot, Rodin, Jules Lemaître, François Coppée, Edouard Detaille," affirmed the writer of the article, "are all Lunarians. Rather round-shaped heads, salient frontal bones, eyes and eyebrows in close proximity, a calm and steady but vague gaze, full but not tight-set lips, a well-rounded nose, and a general air of sad kindness—these are the physiognomistic traits of the lucky type." Lacking any special information about his future, astrological or other, he could only comfort himself, as men of his stamp do, by shaking off his fits of depression as soon as possible, and straining every nerve in each fresh effort.

During the latter part of the decade, requests began to be more frequent for reproductions of the sculptor's masterpieces at one and another of the foreign exhibitions held in the various capitals or large cities. In 1897, five plaster statuettes went to the second International Exhibition of Art at Venice; and in the same year a bronze bust of Dalou, together with a plaster cast

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of the "Inner Voice," were sent to Stockholm, to the General Exhibition of Fine Arts and Industry, which was open from the middle of May to September. There is a story connected with the appearance of the master's works at this latter place which has sufficient interest to be related here. It may be premised that the invitation to exhibit was given in person by Prince Eugene of Sweden, who, in the spring of 1896, came to Rodin's studio in company with the painter Fritz Thaulow. In the following December, as President of the Fine Arts Section, the Prince wrote renewing the invitation, adding: "You know what importance I attach to your taking part in the Exhibition." So the pieces were despatched and duly put on view. They naturally excited much notice; there was a good deal of sharp fencing, even, between critics, which later developed into a serious quarrel. When the time for making purchases arrived, the Secretary of the Fine Arts Section, Mr Ossbahr, proposed that the bust of Dalou should be included. His proposal was rejected. Thereupon the rival Museum of Christiania intervened and bought it. At the close of the Exhibition, Rodin wrote to say that he was willing to hand over the "Inner Voice" as a present to the National Museum, if the authorities would accept it. A month after, Mr Ossbahr replied, thanking him in the Prince's name for the offer, and begging him to accept from the King the Commander's Cross of the Vasa Order. Unfortunately, he had a disagreeable piece of news to communicate at the same time. The National Museum Committee had refused his offer, only one member, the Curator, Mr G. Momark being in favour of accepting it. As soon as Prince Eugene heard of the decision, he wrote from Florence, where he was staying: "For the moment absent in Italy, I have just learnt that the Stockholm National Museum Committee has thought fit not to accept the piece of sculpture you were so kind as to offer.

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. . . I need not tell you how astonished and especially indignant I am at this lack of courtesy towards you personally, and towards the artist so highly esteemed throughout France and Europe. I should be still more grieved if you were to draw the conclusion that it was the expression of a general opinion, and that artistic ideas were still so little developed in my country. I think the matter may be taken in a comic light, and that we may see in it only the narrow judgment of a committee which has already distinguished itself by similar refusals, and which, besides, is insufficiently acquainted with your art. Hoping this annoying incident will not leave you with too unfavourable an impression of your participation in our Exhibition, I remain, most sincerely yours, EUGENE."

To counterbalance this piece of rudeness from the Museum Committee, the sculptor received, in the same month, a letter signed by fifteen artists of the country, expressing their sorrow for the discourtesy and their sincere appreciation of his talent. The King put a fitting end to the incident by asking that the "Inner Voice" might be made over to him for his own private collection.

It would be biographically interesting to know in what degree and in what countries other private collections have acquired specimens of the master's statuary. Years ago, the number was considerable, those of Messrs Peytel, Kahn, Roux, Pontremoli, Blanc, and Fenaille being well known in France, and that of Mr Yerkes in America. Now, there are names besides in England and on the Continent which, when the time comes for making up the list, will figure among the important possessors of masterpieces.

A page of Rodin's existence, as it was towards this close of the century, has been written by Mdlle. Judith Cladel in her book previously quoted. Confining herself to the limits indicated by the title, "Rodin,





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Sketched from the Life," she jotted down, for several years, her own impressions and those of a companion, together with characteristic fragments of conversation; then wrought them together into a compact whole with taste and discretion. The chief place where the two ladies studied their subject was in his studio, arriving generally at the end of the afternoon, sometimes surprising him before he had finished his work, while he was still clad in his modelling smock; and, by these many glimpses of the man in his occupation, forming the likeness to be preserved. Now and again, the sculptor accorded them his leisure. One Sunday, he met them at the Louvre, and talked to them of the antique that he loves so intensely. Another day, in September, he went out to their retreat at St Cloud, and accompanied them in a memorable ramble through the Park, giving free rein to his fancy stimulated by the historic associations of the spot, as by its native beauty. Seen so, under various aspects, in his genuine moods, and observed naïvely with the sole aim of obtaining a portrait as faithful as could be, Rodin comes out in this book with a truth to himself that a more ambitious writer might not have obtained. The essential features are there, with a touch of Carrière's atmosphere surrounding them, and none the less attractive for it.

Before Mademoiselle Cladel's sketch, a study of the sculptor's complex mentality, interwoven with some very eloquent, appreciative criticism of his statuary, and set in the broad outlines of his life, was published by Léon Maillard in 1898. It is the longest and, all in all, the completest work yet written in French on Rodin. The subject is dealt with too lyrically and the events too disconnectedly for it to be considered as an adequate biography. But, on the other hand, there is much psychological penetration in it, and, above everything, it is warm with the master's influence. That Rodin should

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have inspired the sincerely fervid chapters it contains is one of the most considerable facts in his career.

While in Paris, towards the end of the decade, the Prince of Annam paid a visit to the "Villa des Brillants" at Meudon, and, after inspecting what was in the studios, he asked if he could be presented to Madame Rodin. It happened that the mistress of the house was engaged in doing a little washing. In spite of domestic helps there are many things involving manual labour she prefers to undertake herself. From the place where she was occupied, she had already perceived the Prince and another foreigner go by the yard as they passed from the drive; but, having no expectation of being called, she had continued her task. On receiving the message, she came just as she was, contenting herself with an apology for appearing in working attire. "Madame," replied the Prince, with most gallant intent, "see this hand, it can draw and paint and dig." Of the drawing, before leaving the studio, the Prince gave a practical illustration, which the master has kept. It was a rapidly executed sketch, and, as he says, shows considerable talent.

Another presentation, but two or three years earlier and with rather more warning, was that of the sculptor to the Duke d'Aumale. The intermediary was Count Robert de Montesquiou, whose good fortune it is to have acquired, at the sale of the Goncourt collection, the first proof of Rodin's group known under various names—"The Minotaur," "The Nymph carried off by a Satyr," etc. De Goncourt attached great value to this piece of statuary, in which the struggle of the woman with the hairy monster is brought out with vivid realism. It was on a Sunday that the Duke and the master met at Chantilly in the former's residence; and, although possessing but little critical competence in matters of art, the host showed by his welcome that he knew how to honour a true artist.

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The year 1899 was one of feverish activity. In addition to the monument for South America, which had to be completed, there were numerous other pieces of work carried through or finished, in view of an adventure which the master was intending to enter upon during the forthcoming World's Fair to be held in Paris. All this notwithstanding, he contrived to prepare some copies of his great statues, and despatch them to Amsterdam, where they were shown at the "Arti et Amicitiae Club." Following them to see that they had been properly placed, he spent a few days in wandering about, accompanied most of the time by Mdle. Cladel, whose letters to him of this date reveal that she had helped considerably towards the success of the scheme. It was his first visit to Amsterdam. Arriving in the midst of an August sunset, he beheld the city's many gables tinged with red and gold; and, with his fondness for oriental comparisons, he likened the scene to a town of the Arabian Nights. Better informed than his guide, one of the things he immediately inquired after was Rembrandt's house, which no one seemed to know about. They found it, nevertheless, in the Joden-Breestraat. The pictures came next, the "Night Round," the "Jewish Betrothed," "Admiral Tromp's Wife"—the last he judged fine but cold. All his enthusiasm broke out at the sight of the "Syndics," the painting of Rembrandt's ripe age, and which yet, perhaps, is one of the least appreciated among the vulgar. After examining the rest of the town, they went on to the Hague, where an artists' dinner awaited them, and thence to Scheveningen, accompanied by a few friends, among whom was the graver and painter, Philippe Zilcken. Here another dinner gathered together a circle of ten, all hanging on the master's words as he talked still of Rembrandt, one or two naïvely astonished to see that the great sculptor had an appetite like other men.

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The trip was prolonged as far as Rotterdam and Dordrecht. The cicerones in this latter stage were two other ladies, one the secretary of the Kunstkring Club of Rotterdam, Mdle. Cladel meanwhile returning to Amsterdam to wait for the chief excursionist. A French newspaper subsequently published a translation of the account given by Mdle. Pauline Van Ysselstein of how they went from Rotterdam to Dordrecht in a boat. "We were quietly sitting, while on the bank the windmills slowly turned," she says. "'Your country,' exclaimed Rodin, harmonises with my spirit. The environs of Paris are congruous and beautiful, but they are too pretty, too suave for me. Here things are more serious and profound. Now, I quite understand how Rembrandt was able to do what he did, to feel as he felt. How restful your river is! I begin to understand. There is beauty in slowness.' While wandering through Dordrecht, amidst houses with old motley-painted fronts, the recollections of the boat came back to him. 'I felt while on it,' he said, 'a beneficent calm I had not experienced for years.' Like all strangers, he was delighted with Dordrecht and its church surrounded by verdure. 'Ah! those fine trees!' he cried when we turned, and the church, with its rusty colours, showed behind the green. For a long time he studied the wonderful choir stalls. 'I understand,' he said, going away. Dinner was served on the terrace of the hotel opposite the broad river, where the white, grey, and brown sails of the little boats were flitting about; while, on the horizon, the mills turned slowly and the sun sank, gliding through the clouds, colouring the deep waters, the sails, the verdure, the rows of houses, and giving to everything the warm tints of an old picture. 'Since this morning,' said Rodin, 'I have not been out of the sixteenth century. Nothing is changed here. It is Cuypp, Van Goyen, Salomon, Ruysdael—everything just



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as then. How nice it is! How happy one must be in Holland!' Then he relapsed into silence, which he broke with the joy of a person who sees something clearly hitherto only dimly perceived, repeating: 'Decidedly, slowness is beauty.'"

## CHAPTER X

### THE "CLAUDE LORRAIN" AND "BOURGEOIS DE CALAIS" MONUMENTS

IN no branch of his art has Rodin had to encounter greater opposition than in his monumental statuary, perhaps for the reason that in monuments raised to commemorate the dead, conventionalism is most rife. Being common property, the majority of them are conceived and executed to suit a commonplace taste, and are either melodramatically unreal or, by an opposite extreme, without life and insignificant. A composition in which there is a true connection of the parts, not less spiritual than material, and a synthesis which relates the whole to the circumstances that have called it into existence, is less readily appreciated, except when there has been previous education. This is perhaps why so few sculptors produce monuments worthy of immortality. It is one of the highest testimonies that can be paid to Rodin to say that he has turned resolutely from the facile successes which were within his reach, had he chosen to pander to the tastes of the multitude. It is not that he disdains sincere homage; praise given to productions of his that he knows to be good pleases him; but he has never made such praise the criterium of his work.

Although, by the date of their inauguration and by the maturer stages of their execution, the "Claude Lorrain" and the "Bourgeois de Calais" must be regarded as comparatively recent, their commencements go back to the years 1883 and 1885 respectively. In 1883, a movement, at the head of which was the landscape painter





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Français, was set on foot for the erection of a statue to the memory of Claude Gelée, or, as he is more usually called, Claude Lorrain, one of the most celebrated of French painters, and also one of the most interesting figures in the history of art. Born of poor parents in 1600, he left, while quite a boy, his native place, Chamagne, on the banks of the Moselle, to go and help his brother, who was an engraver at Friburg. From there an uncle took him, at twelve years of age, to Rome, where, with the exception of two years spent at Nancy, between 1625 and 1627, he lived till his death in 1682. In his pictures there is one dominating charm, the sun and its light. Throughout his life, it seemed to be the sole study of the painter to interpret every possible effect of the sun's rays on land or sea. Even in paintings which are not in his best manner, the atmosphere redeems the rest. Claude Lorrain's fame quickly spread far and wide. The King of Spain ordered pictures from him, four of which still exist in Madrid. One of his designs, a scene from the “Æneid,” found its way to England, where it adorns a royal chamber; and a sketch-book of his, in which he set down his projects for pictures in order to prevent unauthorised use being made of the finished canvases, now belongs to the Duke of Devonshire. Quite a number of his paintings are in the Louvre, the “Harbour at Sunrise,” the “Harbour at Sunset,” the “Village Festival,” the “Campo Vaccino at Rome” being in his best style.

The committee formed for the collection of the necessary funds had its headquarters at Nancy, the capital of Lorraine, Claude Gelée's native province; this was appropriate, since the statue was to be erected at Nancy. A sub-committee was appointed to sit in Paris, and to this body was confided the task of selecting a sculptor. A restricted competition was opened, and twelve sculptors sent in rough models, Rodin being one of the twelve. His



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was the one chosen. The minutes of the meeting at which the matter was decided contain the following<sup>1</sup>: "The sub-committee for the Claude Lorrain monument assembled on the 8th of April (1884) at the Galerie Durand-Rueil, there being present—Messrs Français, Chapu, Dubois, Mougenot, Rapin, Adam, Grosjean - Maupin, Busson, Cesbron, Burty, Roger Marx. After inspection of the models and projects, votes were taken, with the result that No. 9 was selected. . . ." Accompanying the No. 9, was the sculptor's explanation. "The pre-occupation in this project," he says, "has been to personify, in the most tangible manner possible, the genius of the painter of light, by means of a composition in harmony with the Louis XV. style of the capital of Lorraine. In "Claude Lorrain's" face, surrounded with air and light, it is proposed to express the painter's attentive admiration for the scenery amidst which he stands. The idea is that the statue itself should be in bronze, the socle, with its decorative group, in stone." The voting of the eleven members of the sub-committee revealed that six were in favour of No. 9, four in favour of No. 3, and one in favour of No. 10. The number 3 was Falguière. Rodin obtained his commission, therefore, only by a majority of one. Still it was a triumph. Without decrying Falguière, it may be said that in him on this occasion, the conventional style of sculpture received a warning, an intimation of its insufficiency. Monsieur Marx was jubilant. It was his first victory. Others were to follow.

The question will be probably asked why, since a complete sketch of the subject was in the sculptor's mind in 1884, he should have been so long in finishing it. As long intervals between the inception and the achievement have been the rule with all Rodin's greater works, what has been already said in this reference upon the "Porte

<sup>1</sup> This and the next quotation kindly communicated by Monsieur Marx.

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de l'Enfer” will to some extent hold good here and elsewhere. He was not pressed for the delivery, and, on his side, was not loath to keep the group under his observation. Of course, there was the money to be collected, which took time, especially as, in the case of a painter long dead, there was not the same enthusiasm in the public which is sometimes aroused when the subscription list is opened immediately after the great man's death. Finally, everything was made ready, and the unveiling ceremony took place on the 7th of June 1892.

Like the good novelist who weaves the intricate threads of his story round a central fact which permeates and makes the pattern and plot, so Rodin in his statuary has a main idea which, in each piece, constitutes its moral unity. In the group of “Claude Lorrain”—his own explanation above intimates it—the main idea was the light which the painter had so loved, and the entire monument speaks of it and evokes it. Represented standing and studying an effect of the sun on his picture, the artist—plebeian in his features and build—takes on the transfiguration with which he seeks to endow his landscape. The attitude is one of action, the left knee being bent and the weight of the body being supported by the right; the left hand is stretched down and holds the palette, the right hand is unconsciously raised, grasping the brush while the lifted head, eager eyes, and half-open lips, as he turns in the direction from which the sun's rays are coming, show that he is comparing them with his own rendering. The garments are those the painter would have worn in the open air—the thick boots and leggings, fit accoutrements for his excursions in the fields; the sweeping curve of the soil on which he stands, a token of the broad expanse which more often than not was his studio. Rodin's comment on his model, while it was still in his studio, gives his intention and a detail historically important. He said to some one who interviewed him :

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"My Claude Lorrain has found, and he is admiring what he always found, what he always admired, and what we find and admire in his pictures—a splendid sunrise. The broad orange light bathes his face, intoxicates his heart, provokes his hand armed with a palette. I have put him a palette so that the good workman may be recognised in him. The resemblance I caught in this way. The best and only likeness we have of him is just Marchal's face, the painter Marchal. That is a happy chance for me and flattering to Marchal. So I have a living Claude Lorrain, instead of a sheet of paper more or less covered with black strokes. As regards the soul, the thought, the genius of Claude, I had his pictures, in which he has put the sun and himself." The pedestal was utilised to give the statue its allegorical accompaniment. From the shaft underneath the entablature, which represents night, Apollo emerges, guiding his two-horse chariot. Only the fore-quarters of the horses and the upper part of the god are fully disengaged from the black mass of clouds that towers above, and hangs round, and rolls down below the horses' feet. With his right hand guiding his snorting, rearing steeds and his left hand aloft pushing back the overwhelming darkness, the figure of Apollo with its rushing force presents the counterpart of the energetically poised painter above. The two correspond admirably. The god lends majesty to the artist, and thus, without altering the physical attributes of the painter by one jot or tittle, Rodin, through the allegory, throws round him a halo of glory.

The good people of Nancy—at any rate, a great many of them—did not approve of the sculptor's interpretation. They politely waited until the inauguration ceremony was over—they could hardly do less, since the President of the Republic, Monsieur Carnot, honoured it with his presence—and then began to manifest their displeasure. What they wanted was a Claude Lorrain in transcendent proportions, and not sacrificed, as they said, to the figure

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underneath. They were willing to admire Apollo and his car, but asserted that the very superiority of this part accentuated the inferiority of the rest, which was “statuettish,” a slight Chinese shadow without discernible details against the sky. They denied the historic characterisation of the man, found fault with the pose, deemed that the body was of sorry structure. A witty senator saw in the statue the legacy of generations that had no knowledge of gymnastics. Certain critics called it the product of an unhealthy art, which strained after outlandish movements and wounded the sentiment of the beautiful. One big-wig summed up the matter by saying: “In fine, we consider it bad, and yet we are no fools!” The dissatisfaction spread to the local authorities, who talked of nothing less than displacing the monument.

Luckily for the town’s credit there were two men whose counsel in this crisis was listened to and ultimately accepted. Both were natives of the locality, and the fact was not without its influence. One was Roger Marx, who needs no introduction, the other Emile Gallé,<sup>1</sup> a second Bernard Palissy, who devoted his life to the artistic fusion, enamelling, and crystallising of glass. Some of the latter’s remarks in an article concerning the statue, which he published in the *Progrès de l’Est* on the 7th of August 1892, are too striking and pertinent to be omitted here. He says that “to see a work of art well, it is necessary to have the right point and moment of vision. To see the statue of Claude Lorrain is no more difficult than to look at a picture in its proper light—that is, by placing one’s self so as not to be troubled by the shining of the varnish. Of course, the false light required for the examination of a stained-glass window condemns the beholder of a bronze statue placed in a like situation to see only an opaque blot on a luminous background. Now the statue has the northern sky as a background,

<sup>1</sup> Recently dead.



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and the painter is studying the dawn with his head turned towards the east. In clear weather, the monument has its right position to be well seen from daybreak and during all the morning. *It is therefore logically placed.* Later, its details become less defined, in proportion as the background becomes more vividly illuminated. The best position for studying it is against the foliage of a lofty elm, whose towering branches give it a sort of grandiose setting. Seen so, the effect is sure to be felt. As for the historic inaccuracies, they are puerile. Rodin's symbolism is better than the rigidly historical—even if the rigidly historical were known, which is by no means proved. If the elegantly plastic had been the sculptor's chief aim, his central idea would be absent, which has conceived mind in a timid body, urged forward to the attainment of a radiant idea. People would like an Adonis, and Rodin has given them, together with the rupture of the line that pleases the crowd, a physical tension of the body opposed to the ecstatic vision of the mind. Fable, legend would fain have some decorative Thiers, with a Gambettian breast, developed on a tiny historical ground; the sculptor, instead, has hoisted up on his vast imaginative conception the gaunt Chamagne peasant." Monsieur Gallé, with great clearness and wit, distinguished between two forms of artistic manifestation, the one expressive and the other decorative, the second seeking to please by form alone, the first, by reading the meaning of the living body into the counterfeit presentment of it; and, after making an excursion into the annals of past art, which permitted him to trace back this beauty of expression to the Egyptians, he proved that Rodin's "Claude Lorrain" was a splendid example of it—a work at once puissant, grave, poignant, and sweet, rich in teaching and beneficent to whoever would raise his intelligence to its height. This brief and partial outline cannot give an adequate notion of the admirably reasoned out argument, irrefutable and convincing. It







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knocked the bottom out of the agitation, which disappeared except in the person of a few irreconcilables; and the monument has continued to adorn the Péninière of the town. The sculptor made one concession to some of his adversaries, who had objected that the horses were not finished, because their hind-quarters remained in the mass of stone representing the cloud and mist of night, and also because he had fashioned them with a view to their producing a maximum impression of vigour seen from the spectator's ordinary distance. Against his better judgment, he disengaged them more and gave them greater finish, which caused them to lose in power. “I like your horses,” said to him later a connoisseur in the species, “but they look a little fatigued.” That was just what the artist had avoided in his first modelling. It was the mob which had its way for once, and deprived the author of this masterpiece of the intimate satisfaction that was his due. But there is something else that the master relates:—

“In most, if not all of the cases,” he says, “when disputes have arisen over statues I have made, it has been some slight misunderstanding which has set the ball rolling. In the case of the “Claude Lorrain,” it was an invitation to a public dinner which I refused, being tired and desirous of escaping further fatigue.” The opinion is worth noting, especially as grave events so often arise from trifling causes.

The famous group of the “Citizens of Calais,” or “Bourgeois de Calais,” has also a story of its own, with one or two features resembling the preceding one. Rodin may claim not only to have modelled the group, but to have suggested it.

The town of Calais had been long wanting to raise a memorial to the six citizens who, in 1347, saved the inhabitants from destruction; and, about 1840, the local authorities took the matter actively in hand. At first, it was the Agricultural Society which, in 1845, asked

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David d'Angers to undertake the monument ; but this sculptor died before the project could be carried through. Two of his pupils who tried to go on with it were obliged in turn to abandon their intention, the public subscription being insufficient. A third attempt in 1868, when Clésinger was entrusted with the task, also came to nothing, owing to the Franco-German war. Clésinger's rough model was given to the Amiens Museum, and the question remained in abeyance until the month of September 1884. It was the Town Council of Calais which revived the project, and which, after some preliminary hesitation, resolved to make an immediate appeal for funds. A committee was formed to elaborate plans ; and, warned by previous ill-success, the members proposed to raise only one statue, that of Eustache Saint Pierre, the leader of the devoted band, who, when Edward III. demanded their lives, went out of the city to meet their doom, as Froissart says : "*Les chefs nuds, les pieds déchaux, la hart au col, les clefs de la ville et du chastel entre les mains.*"<sup>1</sup> The leader might stand for his companions and himself, the one figure for the six.

When, in January 1885, Rodin was asked to submit a rough model for the committee's approval, he had no intention, or rather no notion, of going beyond his instructions. It was the subject which forced him. On beginning his experiments with Eustache Saint Pierre, mayor of the city, the figure chosen, it seemed to him that the true historic conception would be to represent the old man in the act of going to King Edward's camp. But the more he thought of the matter, the more illogical it seemed to him to lose the opportunity of grouping the other five at the side of the aged mayor. The names and circumstances of three had been always known, the brothers Jacques and Pierre de Wissant and Jean d'Aire.

<sup>1</sup> "Bareheaded, unshod, with halters round their necks, and the keys of the town and the castle in their hands."

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Recently the names of the remaining two had been recovered from oblivion by a discovery made in the Vatican Library. They were Jean de Fiennes and Andrieux d'Andres. Finding his opinion confirmed by the first sketches he made, he proposed to the committee that he should be allowed to supply the whole group for the same sum, fifteen thousand francs, that had been stipulated for the one statue. The proposal was accepted. His friends blamed him, and considered he was acting foolishly. From a pecuniary point of view, they were right. Such an undertaking at such a price meant loss, not gain, in pocket. But, while not despising money, Rodin has never been able to weigh it in the balance, when a masterpiece has been in the other scale. Enthusiastic at the prospect of so great a work, he visited Calais, explored the ground where the pathetic scene had been enacted, became familiar with Froissart's account of it, and then set about putting the six heroes on their legs, according to the varying notions he had formed of their persons and temperaments, and the parts they had individually played on the occasion.

By the month of July 1886, he had his rough model in reduced size ready for examination by the Calais committee; and, one fine morning, the inquisitives of the town were able to see him at the Mairie helping to unpack the case in which it had arrived. The result of the inspection was quite favourable to the sculptor; but some months elapsed before he was officially authorised to proceed with his work. The reason of the delay was a local financial catastrophe which swallowed up nearly the whole of the sum subscribed for the statues up to that date. However desirous the committee might have been, prior to this misfortune, of increasing the remuneration on account of the very different scheme they had before them, it was now impossible to do more than maintain the original agreement, which was finally



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approved in January 1887. The official communication was made to the sculptor as follows :—

“THE MAYOR OF THE TOWN OF CALAIS TO  
MONSIEUR RODIN.

“I beg to confirm my to-day’s telegram apprising you that the Town Council, in their yesterday’s sitting, ratified the decision by which the Committee of the Eustache Saint Pierre monument entrusts you with the execution of the project for the sum of 15,000 francs.”

After this, the work went steadily forward. In 1888, two plaster figures were exhibited complete at the Georges Petit Galerie ; and a year later, during the World’s Fair that was being held in the Champ de Mars, the whole group was placed on view at the same gallery, all the figures, of course, being as yet only in plaster, but of full size.

Although the 1888 exhibition allowed some anticipation, few people were prepared for the spectacle which the sculptor had prepared in the second. With few exceptions, public and critics were thrilled with poignant emotion on beholding it. Once again Rodin had accomplished, and this time on a vaster scale, what he had done with the “St John.” By his handling of the clay, he had brought spirit into the foreground and relegated matter into the background, so that the historic resurrection, the woes of the men, the greatness of their deed for a moment blotted out everything else ; and, behind the silent advancing forms, the battlements of the town appeared to rise over the gate, with a crowd of lamenting relatives and inhabitants beside it, watching the departure of those they never expected to have restored to them alive. As soon as the attention was able to tear itself from the pathos of the scene, it began to investigate the elements which combined to produce the

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effect. In his composition, Rodin had broken entirely with the conventional hierarchy of the academic style. There was no artificial gradation of figures. The personages were placed on the same level and in two rows, yet in such a way that from the principal stand-points the six should be all visible. The positions, besides, permitted each to have his individual action, manifested to the utmost degree. The same shadow of impending fate bound the actors in this drama together,—no other link was necessary—the difference of age and character, and relations of life agitating or influencing them differently in their like circumstances, furnished the variety of interest.

Inevitably, there were some to carp at this simple yet bold conception of fact—the essentially true one, since the real men who started on their journey must have done so with very little care for theatrical posing. Notably, a writer in the *Soleil* fell foul of the sculptor, asserting that his group was not a group, his attitudes too naïve to be proper attitudes. One accusation went to the extreme limit of absurdity by affirming that Rodin had modelled his “Bourgeois” to be seen only at one angle. On the contrary, each of the statues separately, and the entire group had been fashioned and located in such a way as to be effectually seen—not at all angles, a thing on the face of it impossible—but from several vantage points which brought out fresh harmonies of contour and detail. In 1904, the present writer had an opportunity of verifying the foregoing statement *de visu* upon some plaster reproductions of the figures which were temporarily in the museum at Meudon. By repeatedly walking round the single statues, he convinced himself that each profile, compared with each other, was both novel and congruous; and, by performing a similar study of the group, that its arrangement had been most

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cunningly devised. Apparently, the gait was haphazard, the ones pressing on in front, the others lagging behind; in reality, the interspaces had been nicely calculated—the heights of the men, the inclination of the bodies, one with the other—with the object of obtaining an aspect of movement from wherever the light played on the group. And then there was the mathematical ideal block in which the figures were contained. “An oblong, a right-angled parallelogram to be more exact,” says Rodin. “I wanted the group to be placed on the top of a fairly high pillar, so”—and he drew a little diagram with the oblong mounted aloft. “It would have looked just as I wished,” he added in a tone of regret. Even genius does not get its own will always in contact with the *vis inertiae* of the mass.

The sculptor was equally perspicacious in portraying the anatomy and physiognomy of his personages. Eustache Saint Pierre, the prime mover in the drama, he put in the centre of the front line. “He was the one who said, ‘We must,’” explains Rodin. In this old mayor of the city all the signs of age were marked—the stiffness of limbs and muscles, the blood flowing slowly and swelling the veins, the arms swinging loosely at his sides, the bearing, that of a worn-out frame hardly sufficing to obey the will; his bent head and wrinkled features, with the hair and beard hanging limp and lifeless, breathed a sorrowful resignation which he would fain have imparted to the young man beside him, whose half-turned body and lingering step indicated a struggle between duty and inclination. The contrast between the two was finely and firmly established. With lips apart for words to come which could not, and his right arm held up in a gesture that carried the hand before his closed eyes in order to shut out images which persisted on the retina, the younger presented to the spectator the sharp despair of a man cut off in his flower. On the extreme left, was







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(a second view)

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the figure of a lawyer-like individual beyond his prime, but still retaining all his vigour, walking proudly and defiantly. His head was thrown back a little, his face clean-shaven, his jaws were grimly set, and his hands, hanging down in front, grasped at arm's-length the chained keys of the city. All the bitter resistance of the vanquished was personified in him. Of those remaining, two that were brothers were shown talking together, the elder in front, the younger in the rear, the elder bending and turning to exhort; while the sixth was glancing back towards the gates; it was the separation from his loved ones and his home that occupied his mind and heart and prevented him from thinking either of the conqueror he was going to meet or the death that threatened him.

Just as with the “Claude Lorrain,” some were disappointed and even offended because the sculptor had dared to make his heroes men that exhibited the usual kinds of human weakness. “They would have preferred,” says Rodin, “gestures *à la Marseillaise*, whereas I intended to show my citizens sacrificing themselves as people did in those days without publishing their names.” These murmurs, however, were infinitesimal amid the chorus of genuine praise.

For two or three years after this exhibition at the Georges Petit Galerie, the further progress of the monument was almost entirely interrupted. The subscriptions required for the completion of the enterprise remained at a very low figure. It could hardly be otherwise, since in the town of Calais itself there were certain malcontents who, taking their cue from a few carping critics in Paris, strove to create an agitation against Rodin’s “Bourgeois,” and to convert the Town Council to their opinions. At one time, indeed, there seemed to be chances of this movement succeeding. But, in 1892, the triumph of the “Claude Lorrain” over similar attacks strengthened the hands of those who were fighting this new battle. The

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opposition waxed weaker ; and, although not thoroughly crushed, became powerless to hinder the resumption of an active propaganda in favour of the achievement of Rodin's work.

In 1893, the annual subscription, which had been neglected, was taken up again ; and, when it was found that this did not fulfil the expectation of the promoters, a lottery was organised in the following year, with 45,000 franc-tickets, under the patronage of the Minister of the Interior. With the additional funds thus provided, it was hoped that everything might be paid for, the bronze casting, the architectural basement, etc. However, a little was still lacking, which the Minister of Public Instruction made up from his department by a donation of 5350 francs. Finally, in June 1895, after so many obstacles and petty annoyances, Rodin had the satisfaction of seeing his "Citizens" set up and unveiled.

The happiness was not quite unalloyed. His preference was not allowed to dictate either the exact site or the exact manner of their erection. Failing the lofty pillar with the group on the top, he would have rather they had been placed on the ground close to the everyday life of the city, sharing, as it were, in its interests. Instead, they were stuck up on a low pedestal, in the midst of the Place Richelieu, which had no special connection with the historic event celebrated. Placed on the tall pillar, it would have been necessary to enlarge the figures to two or three times their natural size—the actual statues were enlarged by one-half—and the expense of the bronze would have been proportionately increased. This, no doubt prevented the Town Council from entertaining the suggestion. Still, it is impossible not to regret the unachieved ideal, especially as the Gothic style in which the figures were executed gains by elevation and volume, especially too as, up to now and probably for always, Rodin's "Bourgeois de Calais" must be considered his

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culminating effort in the Gothic. By some perhaps the Balzac will be deemed to occupy this position. But when this latter statue was made, other principles intervened, which, defensible and capable of being artistically executed—the Balzac proves it—none the less carry statuary beyond its expression in the Middle Ages. The characteristic marks of Gothic sculpture, as regards the figure may be practically reduced to two. First, there is the subordination of form to the main idea and spiritual meaning. In a sense, all Rodin's statuary is based on this conception of art; yet, in much of the nude, form, even so controlled, strives, and strives victoriously, for equality, if not predominance. In other nude figures, and *a fortiori* in the clothed ones, the inner life is the unique aim, and the modelling—the wondrously faithful and perfect material modelling—reaches self-effacement. Secondly, there is the simplification, the severity even, of pose, in order that the light and shade, which alone give value to the contours, may have the largest, broadest play over the surfaces, without let or hindrance. The Calaisian “Citizens” possess these two qualities co-ordinated and blended as harmoniously as one could wish to see them.

It was a proud day for Roger Marx when, speaking at the inaugural ceremony, he was able to compare present and past, and discreetly to read a lesson to the pontiffs in criticism who, thirteen years before, had had so little divination. All that he had prophesied had come true, and more. He had not anticipated the “Bourgeois de Calais.” How should he? The true Gothic was so entirely a thing of the past, so bound up with the life of those Middle Ages in which it had flourished, that a revival of it with fresh beauty appeared chimerical. And yet Rodin had accomplished the miracle. To quote Monsieur Marx, “he touched matter with his magic wand and history was embodied.” His confession that he had

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never been able to thoroughly comprehend the anonymous sculptors of old means no more than that he does not altogether understand himself. Of their art he is the perpetuator.

In the Museum at Meudon, where a number of copies of the "Bourgeois" are kept, some show the figures in the nude, the sculptor always fashioning his statuary so in the first instance, whatever may be his intention as to draping. The six citizens he would have liked to dress in sacks. "The smock is a fine garment," he declares; "it is ample and rich in folds, and the sack is still better." The garments, however, that he put on them are almost as simple; they enwrap but they do not hide the bodies.

The Mayor of Calais, Monsieur Dewavrin, who during all the incidents connected with the monument had been Rodin's firm supporter, was another that could rejoice in the triumph. He had a Golden Book printed giving an account of everything in the story that was not controversial, and of the inauguration proceedings. A short letter written by him to the sculptor in the year 1903, and alluding to the continued grumbling of a small minority of malcontents, will serve as an epilogue. He says:—

"Our 'Citizens' still stand impassible, insensible to the insults of time, as to the silly reflections of the foolish, whom they overwhelm with their disdain. A day will come when they will be understood."



## CHAPTER XI

### RODIN'S CONVERSATION

ALTHOUGH, in what has preceded, something of the master's principle and methods is incidentally explained, it has not been possible hitherto for much of his conversation to be brought into the narrative; and the conversation is instructive, succulent, and agreeable; in it Rodin puts himself; it is an easy flow of thought expressed in simple language of deliberate utterance, leavened by a peculiarly rich experience and by the action of an original mind. During the compiling of this biography, it has been the writer's privilege to spend many, many hours in the sculptor's company, and to hear him talk not only in reply to questions, but of his own accord on art or subjects suggested by the way. That which is set down here is culled from these sayings subsequently read over to the master and corrected and approved by him.

"No, I am not a Romanticist," he said in the first interview, as we sat by the little stove of the Rue de l'Université studio. "I should like to call myself a naturalist, but that the word is so much misused both by critics and the criticised. It is safer for me to say that I feel myself to have most affinity with the Greeks, not with the school that coloured their statues—colour has nothing to do with statuary. Light and shade are all a sculptor needs, if his structural expression is right."

And the speaker rose and went towards a small marble figure delicately chiselled, on which the pale rays of a February morning sun played, rendering the limbs semi-



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transparent. The limpidity due to the modelling was an eloquent explanation of Rodin's naturalism—at least of its results. In the next meeting at Meudon, the subject was resumed amid the museum's abundant illustrations.

"Nature has been my great teacher," he said. "Everything can be obtained if Nature is followed. In my early apprentice days, I had not thoroughly learnt my lesson, and, in seeking subjects, sometimes relied on my unaided imagination. But I came more and more to see how much analogy there was between all the forms that Nature begets; and thenceforth I had only to observe them closely, to place myself, so to speak, in the midst of them, for like shapes to arrange themselves in my fancy and to make a harmonious whole. If others cannot do the same, it is because they regard only with a careless eye, and not with the intelligence. So many who begin to study dictate to Nature; if they have a man or woman model before them, they impose a preconceived attitude with no relation to the mind or actual intention of the subject. To-day, towards the end of my career, I still content myself with leaving my model to himself or herself. I dictate no poses. At most, I venture to prolong them, when I have found what I seek. The habit I have acquired of studying Nature without constraining her leads me nearly always to choose my models from among persons who have never posed for other sculptors. If, perchance, I make an exception, I am sure to repent it. Any dictated attitude is for the nonce unnatural, and is worse than useless to the student. It is the finite substituted for the infinite, isolation and interruption of the secret law of our being; the body loses its charm, and becomes absurd and ridiculous. Moreover, this habit of dictating to Nature blinds people to what is really contained in her life, which explains why so often I have been blamed for things affirmed to be unnatural in my sculpture. I reproduce only what I have seen, and what



THREE FIGURES FROM THE SUMMIT OF THE HELL GATE.  
(see page 108)



## Rodin's Conversation

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any one else could see if they would take the trouble ; but then I am always looking, and I know there remains to be found out infinitely more than I shall ever have time to discover. One thing I have come to realise is that geometry is at the bottom of sentiment, or rather that each expression of a sentiment is made by a movement which geometry governs. Geometry, indeed, is everywhere present in Nature. Why, then, should it not be so in the raising of an arm or another instinctive movement of a limb? A woman combing her hair goes through a series of rhythmic movements which constitute a beautiful harmony—a grace of the highest order. The entire rhythm of the body is governed by law. The body cannot uncentre itself. It remains in union with all that composes it, and acts in conjunction with its environment.”

The geometry of nature exemplified in man, as in all creation, is no novelty in the domain of science ; but there is so far very little realisation of it in art. Rodin's intense conviction induces him to return to the subject again and again, but sometimes mingling it with and weaving it into other thoughts. We had been speaking one day of reproaches made him on the score of being too literally faithful in representing his living model, and of not flattering the portraits he produced.

“People don't perceive,” the master exclaimed, “that reality of every kind can have its perfection, age no less than youth, what is called ugly no less than what is called beautiful. To some extent, it is recognised in painting—and more in painting than in sculpture. The portraits of Rembrandt and Holbein show people old and wrinkled, but the beauty is there that belongs to humanity. It cannot be otherwise. Nature is always perfect. She makes no mistakes. The mistake is in our standpoint, our vision. There is beauty and perfection even in the skeleton ; but it wants observing from

## The Life of Rodin

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all round, for the fineness of the workmanship, the exact adjustment of all its parts to be duly admired and understood. It wants also the recognition of the relation of the parts to the uses they fulfil. Utility is one aspect of law, and, as the law is universal, the uses are likewise. He who sees all this is the true artist; and, again, the artist is the seer. He is the man whose eyes are open, and to whose spirit the inner essence of things is made known, at any rate, as a fact of existence. He does not create, since everything is created already. That which he does is to represent, but with one or a few elements, not with all. He is no magician, and cannot in verity reproduce. It is an illusion of creation, not the reality that he makes. The better he sees, the more perfect an illusion his representing will be. He can give it solidity, he can give it the equivalents of colour and warmth and movement; and, if his vision is deep enough, he can give it the illusion of soul and sentiment, and even show soul where some people see none."

This conversation took place as we were going down to the second museum at Meudon, where the Gothic fragments are kept which the master has made it one of his hobbies to collect. The Gothic sculpture, with its strenuous excellence, has influenced him—it has been hinted so before—quite as much as the Greek.

"These men," he said, touching a figure taken from a niche, "worked in a way that sculptors too often disdain to-day. The aim of the Gothic carvers was to fashion something that should have its full meaning and produce its full effect only in the place where it was made to stand. They carved for the architecture, not for themselves. Right up on the cornices they modelled figures in one way; and on windows, or porches, or arches in another, and every piece of their work was exactly calculated to fit into the whole. This gave to their sculpture a more finely individual character, with little



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or no vainly personal mark. Each portion is known, not as coming from the hand of one or another sculptor, but as belonging to a window, or a cornice, or a niche—and the portion helps us to reconstitute the whole. In the old Roman churches you remark the same thing with the building also. You see a half circle, a simple V-shaped beam in the roof, shapes that, looked at from a wrong angle, seem mere school-boy planning. But go a little distance, take in the whole effect, and you will find these apparently rude and primitive forms arrange themselves into a pattern of the most striking beauty. In art, there are so many presumptuous critics that forget the alphabet they are obliged to use in order to spell. What we see at a foot, or a yard, or a hundred yards' distance cannot be the same, just as there is an enormous difference between what is perceived by the aid of a microscope and that which is embraced by the naked eye. The artist, therefore, must choose and must proportion his detail to the distance at which his work ought to be regarded, and he is entitled to ask that his work shall be regarded with the perspective that he himself has chosen. Moreover, the artist must learn to adapt these perspectives to the subject he wishes to treat. This is, perhaps, one of the things he learns last. If he masters this branch of his art thoroughly, he is very near perfection. And yet the attainment is misjudged by the indiscriminating public. Rembrandt went even further in this direction in his old age, and his enemies asserted he had forgotten how to paint. The Gothic sculptors happily lived in an age when there was less captious criticism in matters of art, and when there was a greater sentiment of the beautiful. They reached the best results by their co-operation and their union. The Church itself was then a centre of artistic amalgamation, which we seek in vain to obtain to-day. The arts suffer by division and separation. Wagner was one of the first

# The Life of Rodin

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among the moderns to perceive this ; and his music is an endeavour towards appropriating chord, melody, harmony to a purpose beyond them, a purpose in which they are subordinate. Wagner was a true Gothic artist—a Gothic sculptor in music, if you will. On the other hand, the statuary of the Gothic sculptors prayed, intoned and sang, and triumphed in the cathedrals where they lived. It was a grand art—was the Gothic ! I never come here, and I never see its works elsewhere, without humbling myself and wishing to know it better.”

One of the best known *obiter dicta*<sup>1</sup> of Rodin is that telling the development of his art.

“It did not come to me all at once,” he confesses. “I became daring only after a time. At first, I was timorous. Then, little by little, in the presence of nature, and as I came to know her better, and more frankly rid myself of prejudices in order to love her, I made my resolution. I tried. . . . I was fairly content. . . . It seemed to me it was better. The study of the antique also encouraged me, the sculpture of the Middle Ages, which is as beautiful as the Greek art. I did my utmost to conform my soul to those masters. In the beginning, I modelled things that were clever, neatly executed, not bad ; but I felt it was not that. I had a good deal of trouble. Art is not imitation, and only fools believe that we can create anything. What remains for us is interpretation according to nature. Each interprets in his own way. I have at last succeeded in determining mine.”

We were sitting out in the garden at Meudon, on a bench close to the original plaster cast of the “Creation of Man.” The master recurred to the same theme. He said :—

“I used to think that movement was the chief thing in sculpture, and in all I did it was what I tried to attain.

<sup>1</sup> Related by Camille Maclair in the *Revue des Revues*, and also by other writers.





ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

(see page 220)

## Rodin's Conversation

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My 'Hell Gate' is the record of these strivings. It contains the whole history. There I have made movement yield all it can. I have come gradually to feel that sculptural expression is the essence of the statuary art—expression through the modelling. This is what made the grandeur of the Greeks. There is repose, wonderful repose and restfulness in their sculpture; not the repose of the academic style, which is the absence of nature, the absence of life, but the repose of strength, the repose of conscious power, the impression resulting from the flesh being under the control of the spirit. And they obtained the impression by their constant study of nature and their endless efforts to represent her worthily. It was not a school-boy imitation; they knew how cold this is—tracing a leaf, measuring by compasses, all such literal copyings can furnish nothing of the image which reality makes on our senses. The way in which the artist arrives at his goal is the secret of his own existence; it is the measure of his own vision; it is the scale of his own progress. He exaggerates or deforms the literal in sculpture or in painting; he suppresses or diminishes one part; and yet the whole is true, because he seeks only truth. He seeks to make his work have the same message for the senses within the domain of art as the Creator's work in the domain of nature. My work is often judged by those who have not gone through the experience on which it is based. I have learnt my art as a student learns his mathematics, step by step, and I have solved the principal problem only after solving a good many minor ones. Before condemning me, they should go through the same steps. Their view, I think, would be different. They would see with other eyes."

In speaking of the statues an allusion is made to the sculptor's using mathematical designs in forming his groups. More than once in our talks together, the



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master explained his observance of these designs, and with special reference to the "Bourgeois de Calais."

"Nature," he said, "is the supreme architect. Everything is built in the finest equilibrium; and everything, too, is enclosed in a triangle or a cube, or some modification of them. I have adopted this principle in building up my statuary, simplifying and restraining always in the organisation of the parts so as to give the whole a greater unity. This does not prevent, it aids rather, the execution, and renders the diversity and arrangement of the parts more rational as well as more seemly. Look at some of the groups begotten of the school that cares nothing for this truth to nature's architecture. The figures they make have parts that fly out in directions and at angles that have no rhyme or reason, and frequently are false to the centre of gravity. The sculptor who ignores the teaching that is offered him in the composition of tree and flower and the crystal, who fancies he can do better than the plan by which the universe is raised from its elements, falls into the grossest error. His figures may surprise, but they will never satisfy the eye. He seeks variety, and fails to realise what endless diversity can be wrought within the strong bounds that nature imposes. In the structure proper to each pose, there is a fresh combination, and consequently a fresh revelation. He has an eternal field of investigation, an eternal source of delight; and, if only he will have patience, an eternal possible power of sculptural representation. He can recommence his work over and over again, and find that the result comes out different each time. I often begin with one intention and finish with another. While fashioning my clay, I see in fancy something that had been lying dormant in my memory and which rises up before me in what seems to be a vision created by myself. I know it is not this, but a suggested combination of form which I must have already perceived in

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nature, and which has never before aroused in me the image that corresponds to it. And then, as I go on, and the execution becomes more complete, there is a sort of reverse process in my mind, and that which I have made reacts on my perception of nature, and I find resemblances and fresh analogies which fill me with joy. And then I admire the Creator's work and cannot help thinking that He too takes pleasure in bringing all these wonderful things to the birth and in developing them in such relations with each other."

Occasionally, the conversation assumed a more technical tone, as points of a more difficult comprehension were elucidated. But indeed, even spontaneously, there is in Rodin's outpourings a fair mixture of the abstruse, briefly told, with the longer and racier stream of discourse. It is a welling up which reveals the depth of the current, without materially disturbing its flow.

"In working on a bust, or in fact on any figure," he said, repeating what he had taught his pupil Natorp,<sup>1</sup> years before, "I always carefully model by profiles, not from a merely front view. It gives depth and solidity, the volume, in fine, and its location in space. I do this, however, with a line that starts from one's own brain. I mean that I note the deviation of the head from the oval type. In one, the forehead bulges out over the rest of the face, in another, the lower jaw bulges out in contrast with the receding forehead. With this line of deviation established, I unite all the profiles, and thus get the life-like form. Those who wish to penetrate into some of the invariable rules nature follows in composing, should observe her opposition of a flat to a round, the one being the foil of the other. They should notice also her gradations and contrasts of light producing colour in the real object, and should be careful not to produce effects that are out of accordance with the natural ones. In

<sup>1</sup> See chapter xvi.

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general, they should avoid blacks, unless these have a purpose, and not put them into the depth of a fold in drapery; the latter should always reflect light. On beginning their work, they should exaggerate characteristic features; the exaggerations will get toned down fast enough later on. In the first instance, the exaggerations are necessary to establish the structural expression. It is only by the graduation of these more characteristic traits that the relative value of all the parts can be determined. In the flesh, there is the spirit that magnifies one or another detail of expression. In the clay or marble, it must be by the positive magnifying of the material part, not especially by size, but by the line, by the direction, the depth, the length of its curve, that the expression is made equivalent."

We were in the Museum at Meudon one Sunday morning, the sculptor, the French painter Jacques Blanche, an English artist whom Monsieur Blanche had brought to see the sculptor, and the present writer. Rodin was showing his guests some of his older statuary. An enlargement of the "Ugolino" group occupied a prominent place in the foreground. He was engaged in certain modifications which he explained, adding:—

"I am simplifying the *plans*."

Here was an opportunity. The French word *plan*, frequent in writings on sculpture, is used so loosely by many, and so naturally without definition by all, that the reader, even when he thinks he has grasped the sense of the term, or its various senses, is suddenly arrested by another employment of it in which the meaning looms out as vaguely as ever.

"What do you mean by *plan*?" inquired the one who knew least about the matter.

"It is the architecture of the statue," answered Rodin.

The reply was pithy, but it left the door open to more than one interpretation.

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"Then you use the word as an architect does, when he speaks of the plan of a house?"

"No, not exactly that; it has to do with the relief of the various parts of the statue."

"Then, perhaps, it is a synonym of surface; and when you talk of simplifying the *plans*, it is equivalent to saying that you diminish the number of surfaces?"

"No, not altogether that, either; it signifies getting rid of all that would hinder the light from freely glinting over the surface of the marble."

Apparently it had to do with light, and something, in common, therefore with painting. An axiom often heard in art circles is that the *plan* is to the sculptor what the *valeur* is to the painter. To quote was convenient if only to provoke further discussion. Monsieur Blanche and his friend intervened, the former giving as his notion of *valeur*, the effect of one colour placed in juxtaposition with another, so as to relate the object and make it appear solid. Still we were not arrived at a perfectly clear understanding of the word *plan*."

"I have often been puzzled to translate the word myself into English for English-speaking pupils of mine," admitted Monsieur Blanche. "This is surely a simplification of the *plan*," he continued, pointing to an amplification in the outstretched arm of a statue standing near.

"No," again said Rodin, with a smile; from which negation it was evident that it was not only the profane who failed to seize the exact signification of the word in the mouth of the sculptor most qualified to employ it.

"Look!" he went on, taking a piece of board and holding it in front of a statuette. "You see that nearly all, if not quite all the front of this figure touches the board on this side. There are no projections that interfere with the sweep of the light across these surfaces and the illuminating of the various reliefs. Now look again. Down this side there is another *plan*. I place the board,



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and you may convince yourselves that here, with the exception of the top of the two heads, which I intend to bring up to the *plan*, every projection touches the same straight line."

"Ah! don't change anything!" cried and protested the two painters in a breath, admiring the exquisite rendering of Romeo and Juliet embracing just before quitting each other at the balcony, at the moment of the dawn when—

"Night's candles are burnt out and jocund day  
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops."

Was it to the simplification of the *plans* that the statue owed its perfection? At any rate, the perfection was there, in lines that ravished the eye. Returning to our argument after the illustration, we settled that the real sense of the word *plan* was its mathematical one, and that it could be translated by the word *plane*. The planes of a statue, therefore, are the plane surfaces in which it is contained, and the simplification of the planes is the reducing, for instance, of a group or a statue that was enclosed in a pentagon to another of fewer sides.

"There are many sculptors," concluded Rodin, "who don't keep to this use of the term, and their language is correspondingly inconsistent."

Perhaps, after all, the word is not badly applied sometimes to indicate those amplifications of the parts of a statue which a sculptor makes in order to obtain the due effect of light and shade.

It was another Sunday morning, and again the talk had become a sort of lesson in which the sculptor was replying to a few supplementary questions about the four lines,<sup>1</sup> surfaces, and volumes of the body which the Greeks and Michael Angelo now and then reduced to two in their sculptural treatment of it. The writer had already received Rodin's explanation of this fundamental equi-

<sup>1</sup> See chapter iii.



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brium of the human frame, but the reduction of four to two was not quite plain to him.

"Come," said the sculptor, rising, "I will show you with some clay."

He led the way to one of the studios and asked a workman for some of the blue-black compound that serves for the first model. Breaking a long roll into two, he fixed half of it on a revolving block as a support, broke the remainder into several other pieces, and in a few seconds there was a coming together of legs, arms, trunk, neck, and head, an addition of breasts and thighs, and a figurine stood before us shaped according to the antique.

"See now," said the master, taking his chisel and making a few marks down and across his figure. "You understand the four-line arrangement, the W-on-end position, thus  $\lessgtr$ ," and his chisel again described the zig-zag. "Or a spiral," he continued, "since the body is built up on the spiral principle," and as he spoke he gave a few twists to the clay, so as to make the spiral more visible.

"Now, look again." Here the figure was straightened up from the stand-at-ease position, and then two or three thumb-and-finger pressures were made. The on-end W had become an on-end V, thus  $\succ$ , which the sculptor twisted again into different positions, the torso, however, remaining always in one plane, and the lower part of the body, from the thighs downwards, in another. The loins were the hinge on which the two great oppositions turned, and, arranged like this, it was easy to seize the reason of the simplification.

"You remark," concluded the master, "that the broader surfaces yield a much more effective juxtaposition of light and shade."

Scarcely an interview would pass without some one-line phrase appearing in the midst of the sculptor's dis-

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course, a sudden spark struck out by the impact of a new thought on those that had gone before.

"There are as many kinds of beauty as there are kinds of feeling."

"The best and purest pleasures are those that cost nothing."

"Art is nature's reflection in man; the essential thing is to polish the mirror."

All Rodin's friends to whom he has talked in confidence could doubtless recall similar brevities, focussing the subject and fixing its souvenir.

It would be strange if a mind so constantly observant of phenomena should be silent as to the moral problems they involve. More than once we spoke on the apparent discords in the nature he so loves, and on the world-suffering of which he has had his share.

"After all, evil is only the distance that separates us from the infinite," he said—"a distance that can be continually lessened. The good I see keeps me hopeful. I am content to have lived and had the experience that has fallen out to me. It has taught me more than I thought I should ever know. As for the future, I look forward to it without fear, feeling its attraction even. There is so much in what nature shows us which suggests fuller life and greater beauty, that the yearning for it grows."

A more recent chat was during an early morning drive from Meudon through the wood to Petit Bicêtre, where we breakfasted, and from there round Châtillon, Jouy-en-Josas, and Vélizy. Getting out of the carriage for a stroll through the grassy paths, we talked of what was around us.

"It reminds me of England here," said the master; "the same hedges and sweeps of upland, and the same style of cottages."

This was also the writer's impression. The south side of Paris towards Versailles is very different from the north.

## Rodin's Conversation

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"On foot is the best manner of finding out what a landscape really is," he continued, unconsciously repeating Jean-Jacques Rousseau. "You can go as long as you like, stop when you like, and enjoy everything. It would please me to start from home and walk by short stages, just a few hours each day, slowly through one and another stretch of scenery. People rush their enjoyments as well as their business nowadays. I prefer the more tranquil mode. This undulating land"—pointing to the Bièvre valley—"with its smiling fertility, is more to my taste than either mountain or sea; they always chill me by their lonely wastes."

We admired the richly varied tints of the tree-foliage—some of it in the far background, seen between other trees, assuming a warm purple under the dazzling sun.

"If I must choose, it is the spring tints that appeal to me most," exclaimed Rodin. "They are so delicately fresh and quite as varied as the autumn ones, and then there is the promise of summer in them."

A yellow rock-rose, with its mysteriously beautiful composition of calyx and pistils and stamen, attracted his attention. He looked at it with as much wonder as if he had never seen such a thing before. To him it was, doubtless, a fine piece of nature's statuary, penetrated as he is with the conviction that every microcosm is also a macrocosm. He saw in this yellow rock-rose as much as Wordsworth in his yellow primrose of the rock.

"There are times," he said, "when one of these flowers seems inexpressibly precious. I remember once, when I was not well—it was late on in the winter—I used to go out for a short walk every day in the garden. There was a single, tiny primrose which somehow or other had managed to open its petals before spring. I can't tell you with what eagerness I returned each time I went out to see if the primrose were flourishing. That little flower interested me more than all vegetation besides."

# The Life of Rodin

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We turned into the deep shade of the woods after being in the glare of the sun. The master took off his hat and caught the breath of the cooler air.

"Ah! that reposes after a week's work," he exclaimed, leaning back the better to enjoy it. "For woods of refreshment and meditation, however, I know of none like those round Brussels. They have something so fresh and primæval."

There was a reversion to the favourite theme.

"It is true," he said, in reply to a question, "analysis and synthesis balance each other in the artist; but the analysis is not a tearing to pieces. He thinks—does the artist—of the whole, even in the part, and his study of the part is for him a way towards more nearly grasping the whole."

The carriage passed by a pool where some people were fishing.

"It was there the painter Gros drowned himself," remarked the sculptor, looking curiously at the spot. "He was saddened and soured by old age and the attacks made on his work. It is not altogether easy to support calumny and spiteful misrepresentation. I have had my share, and know something about it. But one can learn to endure. A man alone is stronger than a host, if he will wait his time."

Again, a drive this time towards the south-east, in the direction of Fontenay-aux-Roses and Sceaux, under a hot July sun, brought us to the famous Robinson Crusoe tree restaurant, where Parisians delight to go in summer. We had breakfast in the second story of the tree, with a splendid view over the valley, and returned by the Versailles road, passing Châteaubriand's house. A good deal was spoken on literature, the sculptor's preferences being decided, his comments pithy. Dumas the elder he had read with enjoyment, the younger with little or none. Gautier he praised, but coldly, adding:—





BELLONA  
(see page 87)

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## Rodin's Conversation

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"I met him once at the banquet of the Society of Fine Arts<sup>1</sup> in 1864 or 1865; and, with the confidence begotten of a glass of champagne, I tackled him in conversation. But I fear I said some stupid things, and he did not pay much attention to my youth."

Shakespeare came in for a passing mention.

"A play I am very fond of," the master continued, "is Richard III., which I have read, like the other plays I know, in Montegut's translation. I find the courting scene with Anne a masterpiece of psychological insight."

We spoke, too, of Richardson's "Pamela," which he was still reading, carrying the volumes with him to peruse in the train, and one of which he had managed to leave behind on the seat. Rodin exclaimed:—

"His description of English life seems to me so simply yet truthfully given. There is a *naïvete* in it similar to what I have met with in other branches of eighteenth-century art. And the character of 'Pamela,' besides its intrinsic interest, is a type one feels familiar with directly. Some of the traits remind me of my own sister when a girl."

A turn in the conversation brought up the question of Japanese art, on which, indeed, the sculptor's opinions are well known.

"The Japanese art," he said, "is superior to ours by its immense patience of observation and its research of beauty in the smallest things. The Japanese have worked a vein that others have neglected, and have been rewarded by discoveries no other nation has made. This superiority in art is not of recent date; it has nothing to do with the country's adoption of European habits. On the contrary, it has a long past behind it, and has gained perfection through centuries of slow development. I remember once watching some Japanese artists at work during the exhibition. Now and then, intending buyers

<sup>1</sup> See the story at the end of the chapter.

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tried to hurry them, wishing to have the article before it was really finished, and offering the money for it in order to tempt those who were working. But they refused, and would rather lose the money than allow a piece to quit their hands which, in their judgment, was not completed. That is the true artistic spirit; and it has given the Japanese a superiority which enables them to place their productions on our European markets in spite of prohibitive tariffs. If there is a yellow peril, it is in the peaceful invasion of our artistic domain by a strong and united oriental art, whereas we are decadent and disunited."

An anecdote told by Rodin during this same excursion will serve as a conclusion to these scraps of conversation. The subject of it is Alexandre Dumas the elder.

"When I was about twenty-three," he began, "I belonged to a Society of Fine Arts, not the orthodox one, which had its day of notoriety and prosperity. Celebrated artists exhibited there, Ingres and Delacroix among others. The meetings and exhibitions were held in a building opposite the "Crédit Lyonnais," and which has since been made into a theatre. I sent one or two of my things there, and should have sent my "Man with the Broken Nose," only the society came to grief a little before I could carry my intention into effect. On the society's programme was an annual banquet, to which were invited celebrities of various kinds—and mostly men of letters. I attended one of these banquets in 1864, I think, and among those present were Théophile Gautier and Alexandre Dumas the elder. The latter made one of the speeches of the evening. In it he related that on a certain occasion he and Victor Hugo were together in London, and went, by special request, to a reception held by Lord Palmerston. At a convenient moment the host, to whom they had not been introduced, came with his wife to where they were sitting,

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made her sit down between them, pulled out his watch, looked at it a few seconds, and then, addressing his wife, said, 'Remember that you have sat for half a minute between the two greatest poets living.' This was blowing his own trumpet with a vengeance! But the best remains to be told. Not knowing Dumas so well as my elders, I remembered the story; and twenty years later, being in Victor Hugo's company, I repeated it to him. 'Dumas and I were never in England together,' he said when I finished. Evidently Dumas' capacity for invention was not confined to his novels."

## CHAPTER XII

### THE BALZAC STATUE

THE Balzac statue, together with the controversy that raged round it, is one of the most instructive incidents in the history of contemporary art. One issue it raised is an old one, being whether the sculptor should sacrifice his convictions to public taste or public taste bow to him. The second issue was more personal. The question in the particular case was as to whether the sculptor had a moral right, against his own word, to withhold his production, and not to deliver it until he himself should pronounce it to be finished. Throughout the greater part of the dispute, it was the latter issue which occupied the foreground. The story, as told in the following pages, will, it is hoped, supply sufficient data for an answer to both questions, the former as well as the latter depending to a great extent on the individuality concerned. When an honest man fails in his promise, the presumption should be that it is materially impossible for him to keep it; and, when a genius places a new development of his creation before the public, the probability is that he is right. In matters of art, the errors of genius are small, those of the profane are colossal. During this phase of Rodin's work, his genius and his honesty were impugned in a way that showed how utterly sweet reasonableness had been put out of court and its room taken by popular prejudice, or a truckling to it among those whom education and perception ought to have rendered more independent.

The howl of execration that went up from so many in







HEAD OF THE BALZAC STATUE

# The Balzac Statue

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1898, when the plaster statue of the novelist was at length exposed to view in the Palais des Machines, was not entirely spontaneous. It had been largely prepared by jealousies and unreflecting disappointment in the time of waiting. Not a few were quite prepared to say even before looking, "*Parturiuntur montes, educitur ridiculus mus*";<sup>1</sup> and, though, when they did look, they saw that the quotation would not apply, though it was not to be denied that there was something grandiose in the huge pillar-like figure crowned by the wonderful head, yet, as it did not correspond to their preconceived notions, as it did not conform to the ordinary canons of statuesque drapery, as it simplified the lines of the body in order to concentrate attention on what was above it, condemnation was passed by the majority of beholders—passed in noisy demonstration, for majorities like to make themselves heard. Not that they had it all their own way; Rodin's tried friends and supporters nearly all stuck to him in this instance as they had in other battles, and they made their voice heard. Their defence, if it did not change the opinion of those whose mind was already made up, was none the less helpful to a considerable number—and among them the present writer—who without prejudice had gone to see the statue, had examined it, had vaguely felt its attraction amid their wondering admiration of its power, but had not understood it. The opportunity now afforded them of studying it in connection with the sculptor's preceding work furnished them with a proper criterion, and they were able to appreciate it aright.

The beginning of the story goes back to the first year of the decade. When towards the end of the eighties the "*Société des Gens de Lettres*"<sup>2</sup> collected thirty-six thousand francs for the purpose of giving the author of the "*Comédie humaine*" his statue, the sculptor chosen

<sup>1</sup> "The mountains are in labour and a wretched little mouse is born."

<sup>2</sup> Men of Letters Society.

# The Life of Rodin

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was Chapu, whose reputation had been made by his "Jeanne Darc at Domrémy" and "Mercury inventing the Caduceus," both acquired by the State for the Luxembourg Museum. This was in 1888, and Chapu died in 1891, while yet his rough model was in an embryo condition. The Committee, therefore, had to look about for another sculptor; and, among the letters received from candidates for Chapu's succession, was the following:—

*"3rd July 1891.*

"To the President of the Société des Gens de Lettres.

"DEAR SIR,—Being informed that the Société des Gens de Lettres would perhaps have to look out for another sculptor for Balzac's statue, I write to ask you, in this case, kindly to submit my name to the Committee. I offer to execute a Balzac in bronze, about three metres high, with pedestal to match, in eighteen months from the receipt of the commission, for the sum remaining over from the subscription. I have always been interested in this great literary figure, and have often studied him, not only in his works but in his native province.—I remain," etc.<sup>1</sup>

After a period of hesitation and negotiation, Rodin's offer was accepted, not unanimously as the letter reveals which was addressed to him on the 14th of August, by Zola, and which gives the figures of the preliminary vote.

"MY DEAR RODIN,—I am happy to announce to you officially that the Committee of the Société des Gens de Lettres, at their meeting of July 6th, selected you by twelve votes against eight to execute the statue of Balzac, which is to be erected on the Square of the Palais Royal. Everything being now settled with the family of the late Monsieur Chapu, the vote of the Committee is henceforth

<sup>1</sup> This letter was written on the advice of Alphonse Daudet, Emile Zola, and one or two other well-known men.

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final. I shall feel personally obliged if you could push on your work as quickly as possible, and submit your plan in November. We all reckon on your great talent to give us a superb statue.—Cordially yours, E. ZOLA.”

The Committee's anxiety for a speedy termination was natural enough. They had to deal with subscribers, many of whom supposed that a statue could be turned out to order, with the same celerity and in the same mechanical way as an ordinary manufactured article. Three years had been wasted; the subscribers wanted something for their money. And yet, as literary artists themselves, the Committee ought to have refused to let this anxiety guide their conduct. They knew that artistic production cannot be calculated and wrought out to date. The responsibility for what subsequently occurred rests largely on them. On the other hand, there was the pledge, which was a mistake on Rodin's part, since it was against his nature, against his method, and against the interests of those he was desirous of serving. The promise was not quite so voluntary as his letter of application would seem to indicate; Rodin knew before he wrote that the commission would be given only on a condition of this kind; but still it was sincere. There was the three years' labour of Chapu that might probably be utilised; his other works were just then in a satisfactory phase, and no obstacles appeared likely to interfere with his carrying the execution straight through.

Some six thousand francs of the thirty-six had been expended by Monsieur Chapu. About thirty remained. It was settled, therefore, that the price to be paid to Rodin should be thirty-one thousand francs, of which ten were advanced as earnest-money and to provide for incidental outlays. So the sculptor started on his new undertaking with characteristic thoroughness and energy. Balzac's writings being already familiar to him, he proceeded to

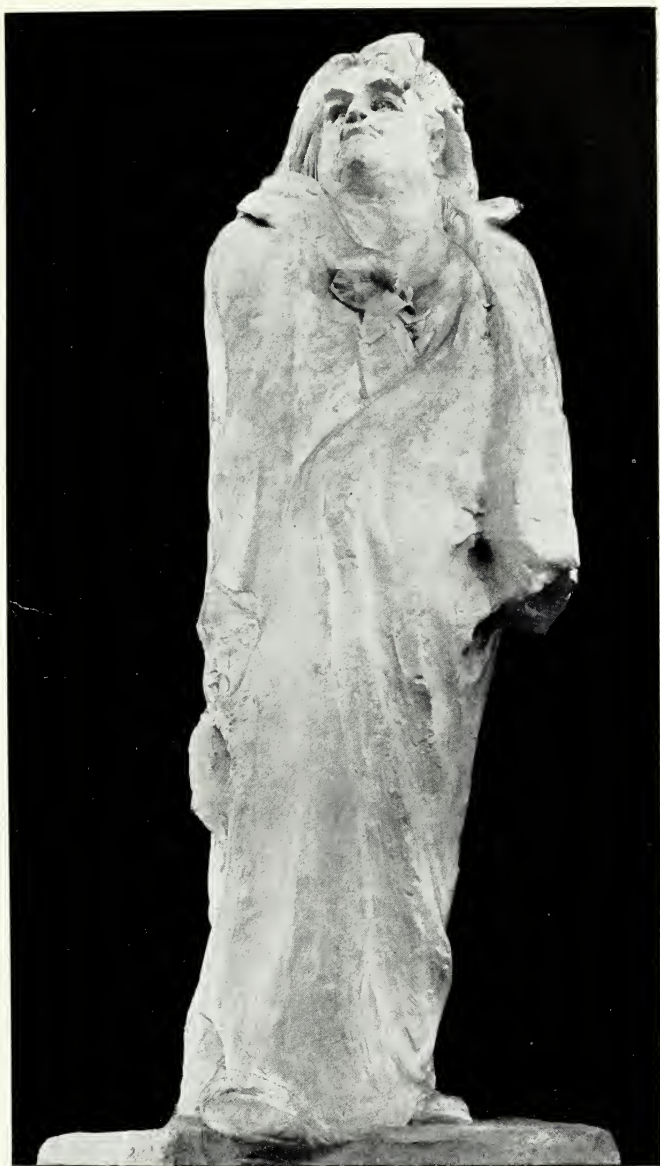


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learn all he could about the novelist's life, the history of the novels themselves, the spots where the great man had lived, the portraits and descriptions made of him by contemporaries. Two precious documents he had within his reach, a bust for which Balzac had sat to David d'Angers, and a fine daguerreotype showing the author of *Eugénie Grandet*, half-length in a standing posture, the open shirt collar bringing into prominence the broad, massive neck. In his conscientious endeavour to impregnate his imagination with the circumstances and events of Balzac's life, Rodin spared no pains. He even went more than once to stay in Touraine, the novelist's native province, in order if possible to receive from the landscape and surrounding objects whatever influence they had exercised on the subject he was studying. While searching for a person sufficiently like Balzac to serve as a model, he came across an old tailor who had made trousers and waistcoats for him. Though he had long retired from business, the tailor's souvenirs of more than forty years before were precise in regard to his illustrious customer; and, the measures he had taken being still preserved, a suit was provided for the sculptor's benefit.

But, the further Rodin went with his task, the more he found that he was faced by one of the most difficult sculptural interpretations that had yet devolved on him. The lineaments were strange and abnormal, the character was most complex, the personality extraordinary, the literary production phenomenal. His difficulty, however, was not only the necessity of making a statue in which these various elements should enter. Such a difficulty to him was chiefly a material one, and material difficulties had ceased to embarrass him. The fact is that, at this time, the sculptor's mind was strongly x/turned towards the Gothic conception, farther developed by himself, of simplifying into large surfaces, adapted to the play of light and shade, all that constitutes the trunk



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of a statue, in order to concentrate upon the head the highest possible vigour of inner life-expression. Balzac was just the subject for the experiment, which had been partly attempted in the Citizens of Calais and had succeeded.

Chapu's conception had been a Balzac seated with two allegorical figures, a boy and a woman, at his sides. Rodin, being opposed to the addition of other figures, and preferring the standing position, was unable after all to utilise Chapu's work, and had to begin *de novo*. The head and face that he had to represent, and the body which supported them, are thus described by Lamartine: "It was the face of an element; big head, hair dishevelled over his collar and cheeks, like a mane which the scissors never clipped; very obtuse; eye of flame; colossal body. He was big, thick, square at the base and shoulders, much of the ampleness of Mirabeau, but no heaviness. There was so much soul that it carried that lightly; the weight seemed to give him force, not to take it away from him; his short arms gesticulated with ease." Rodin's plan, in its broad outlines, was to fashion the individual Balzac with his idiosyncrasies, and in him to incarnate the thinker in action, evolving from out his brain the scheme of a novel, spinning the mesh of its plot, elaborating its characters, co-ordinating its events. As soon as his gathered information allowed him, he started on a number of plaster figures modelled in the nude, each with a somewhat different pose of head or body, and on some of these he draped the monkish dressing-gown that Balzac generally wore when composing. Meanwhile, the year 1892 was slipping away, and it appeared every day more evident that the statue could not be finished within the delay stipulated. Of Rodin's pre-occupations and experiments the Committee of the "Société des Gens de Lettres" seem to have been unaware, or, if they

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knew, to have considered them unnecessary. In the latter part of the eighteen months, there was an exchange of correspondence between them and the sculptor, which caused strained relations, and hindered rather than advanced matters. Some of the members of the Committee, more generous and clear-sighted than their colleagues, held aloof from the subsequent proceedings; in particular, Monsieur Jean Aicard may be mentioned, whose letters to Rodin throughout evince the deepest respect and admiration. Curiously enough, Zola followed the hostile majority. This majority had it all their own way when Monsieur Aicard, together with several besides who supported Rodin, retired from the Committee.

The first tart communication was despatched by the secretary to the sculptor on the 6th of December 1892, reminding him of his bond in curt terms, and urging him to be ready for the date fixed. The pin-prick must have been irritating, when he had expended so much energy, not to speak of money, in conscientious preliminary labours that he might have spared himself. However, he held his peace, and tried to continue his work as if nothing had been said. After the eighteen months had expired without delivery being made, another communication was forwarded to Rodin by the secretary, on the 15th of June 1893, informing him that the subscribers were becoming impatient, and asking how much longer they would have to wait; to this note and another from Zola conceived in the same language, the sculptor replied that he would do his best to give the Committee satisfaction by the autumn of 1894 or the beginning of 1895. Before the end of the former year, a fresh correspondence took place between himself and the Committee, accompanied by negotiations of a legal character. The upshot was an entirely new agreement, from which the obnoxious time-clause was absent. Its place was taken by another, standing as Article 3. "No limit is imposed on Monsieur







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Rodin," it said, "for the termination of his statue. The Society declare that they trust the word of Monsieur Rodin, who acknowledges his moral obligation to complete, as soon as possible, an undertaking to which he is devoting every care, and which imposes a very considerable labour upon him." In return for his regained liberty, the sculptor consented to hand back the ten thousand francs earnest-money which had been paid him on his securing the commission, and to make no claim for remuneration of any kind until he should deliver the statue to the Committee.

Here is the text of his letter :—

"MONSIEUR LE PRÉSIDENT,—I thank you for transmitting to the Committee my desire to become free at the price of a provisional restitution. With the greatest pleasure I accept the Committee's vote (of the 12th of November 1894) restoring me the liberty necessary to the achievement of Balzac's statue as I wish. It is then understood from the terms of the vote you kindly communicate to me that you grant me as long a delay as I shall judge needful. Rest assured that I shall not go beyond it. My sole pre-occupation is to make Balzac's grand figure as perfect as possible.

"The 10,000 francs, which were paid me as earnest-money, shall consequently be handed over to the Deposit Bank as money set aside for Balzac's statue, not to be withdrawn, except by the Société des Gens de Lettres on the completion of the work, or by myself, by an agreement to be made between us on the day I shall deliver the statue.

"Thanking you, Monsieur le Président, for your conciliatory attitude, which I shall not forget, I ask you to believe me, cordially yours, AUGUSTE RODIN."

This third article was a virtual acknowledgment by the Committee that Rodin's explanations were reasonable,

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and that their action had been rather that of an employer towards an employee, whose time they might monopolise. They knew quite well that, between 1891 and 1894, the sculptor had other commissions to finish, notably the groups of Claude Lorrain and the Bourgeois de Calais, not to speak of busts and several pieces which, being begun, could not be altogether laid aside. When a glance is taken at what was accomplished in those years, the wonder is not at the delay, but that one man should have sufficed for it all.

The publicity given to the dispute with the "Société des Gens de Lettres" brought into existence a kind of "Affaire Balzac," only less exciting than the Dreyfus affair. It became the fashion to joke about the non-forthcoming of the statue. Between 1895 and the spring of 1898, the belief spread in many circles that, if the sculptor did not produce it, the reason was that he felt the undertaking to be beyond his power. "Just as Balzac could never write a five-act play," asserted Aurélien Scholl, "so Rodin will never be able to model a Balzac. . . ." "But I've seen the rough model," objected the interlocutor. "Oh!" answered Scholl, "it's only a bit of clay he rolls together hurriedly when anybody rings at the studio door." Monsieur Scholl was wrong. Rodin was successfully, though very slowly, pursuing the achievement of his statue of the novelist, serenely indifferent to the quips and quirks of newspaper or society critics. A fresh series of studies in the nude had been made, based on fuller information, and a correcter idea of the novelist's physiognomy than the bust by David d'Angers—at first over-estimated—had afforded. It is most interesting to compare one of the earlier "maquettes"<sup>1</sup> with the definitive one, and to notice how greatly the sculptor had developed his conception in the interval separating them. When the period of hesitations was ultimately

<sup>1</sup> Rough models.

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closed, and the matured plan was set forth in plaster, it showed a figure standing with arms crossing in front of the waist, and the monkish gown loosely drawn around, with the empty sleeves hanging. If this swathing of trunks and limbs concealed them in detail, they were still divined by the fall and folds of the covering, and even manifest in the most important reliefs.

Interviewed by a journalist in August 1896, Rodin was able to say: "To-day the bulk of the work is done. I have made a Balzac that pleases me. It would have been a better one had I been let alone. But, as I have planted him on his feet, my dear great man satisfies my conception of him. I have endeavoured to put into a simple statue not only my admiration, but that of others for the master-writer. A few months more are needed before submitting it to popular inspection. Within a year the subscribers shall have their wish, if only I am granted the tranquillity so necessary to me."

As a matter of fact, nearly eighteen months more passed before the last touch was put, making up about seven years since the idea of the statue germinated in the sculptor's mind. Then, in the spring of 1898, Rodin packed up his finished work, and it left the studio of the Rue de l'Université for the big Palace of the Champ de Mars. Betrayed into fresh confidences at this moment by another member of the Press, he allowed a glimpse to be obtained of what he had thought and felt during the interval. "I hope I have succeeded," he said, "and yet, if I must be frank, I must own that I should have liked to keep still for some months, away from every eye, the statue to which I have given the final pressure of my thumb. I should prefer to contemplate it every day for a while, and wait until a sudden inspiration, such as occasionally flashes through the brain, came to flood my imagination and enable me to perfect and idealise my work. For a work, even when achieved, is never perfect ;



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it is always susceptible of a modification that can increase its beauty. What I should love above all would be to dwell in some cloister, freed from the cares of existence, where, like the monks of old, I might, without remarking the lapse of days, linger over my dreams and strive to embody them in marble. Just now, I am finishing the monument of Victor Hugo, which is to be erected in the Garden of the Luxembourg. I have spent five years modelling a group composed of two women, symbolising voices that whisper into the poet's ear. Well, it seems to me that only a few months have gone by since I began the monument, and I regret to part with it."

The "Balzac" reached the Salon in company with another masterpiece of the sculptor, the "Baiser," one of the variations, as previously remarked, on the theme of Francesca and Paolo, and which to-day is in the Luxembourg Museum. The contrast between the two pieces of statuary was great. There was the marble group of two, in which every effort had been concentrated on incarnating love and loveliness, with each detail wrought out to the finest perfection; and there was the plaster giant, whose every outline, surface, and part, while representing the individual in his most characteristic traits, gave him a maximum of ideality. Referring to the contrast the two statues offered, Rodin afterwards said:<sup>1</sup> "When my marble group was carried away it passed in front of the "Balzac," which I had left on purpose in the yard, in order to get a good look at it in the open air. I was not dissatisfied with the simple vigour of my marble, but, just when it was going by, I felt it was tame, and yielded to the other, as the celebrated torso of Michael Angelo to the antique statues; and I realised that I was right, even though I were alone against every one. My modellings are present, whatever may be said to the contrary, and they would be present less if I were to

<sup>1</sup> Related by Camille Mauclair in the *Revue des Revues*.

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finish more in appearance. As to polishing and repolishing toes or locks of hair, this has no interest in my eyes, and would compromise the central idea, the grand lines, the soul of what I intended to express; and I have nothing more to say to the public on the matter. Here must be the limits between them and me, between the faith they should have in me and the concessions I have no right to make."

The latter half of the preceding statement was a reply to the attacks of his critics during the exhibition. In anticipation of them, Roger Marx, who had seen the figure in the studio, wrote a few wise words which were not as widely published as they deserved. If more generally known, they might have prepared the public taste; and the subsequent expression of opinion would have had less impulsiveness and been more reserved. "In Rodin's iconic statues," he said, "whether of Bastien Lepage or Claude Lorrain, the garment, relegated to the rôle of framework or accompaniment, plays no other part than in the portraits of Franz Hals and Rembrandt. In nowise photographic, broadly indicated by means of intentional abbreviations, it never interferes with the significance of the gesture; it never distracts the attention from the face where life and thought are manifested. Here the attitude is full of calm and sovereign tranquillity; the arms are crossed in front, without letting anything be seen of the prelate's hands that Balzac was so proud of. Consequently, the eye at once seeks the countenance, and endeavours to penetrate its significance. The bust by David d'Angers had shown a Balzac embellished, insipid, of Olympian gravity, whereas, according to Gautier's testimony, the usual expression of the face was a sort of puissant hilarity, a Rabelaisian mirth, but ennobled by a mind of the highest order. Rodin has made it his business to seek for that which, in this broad, frank, open face, betokened power, will, genius; and he has aimed at the

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resemblance which is required by the perspective of a public square—a statuary resemblance, with accentuation of such characteristics as indicate the man’s personality: to wit, the elevation of the forehead, the depth of the eye’s setting, the keen brilliancy of the glance, the bulk of the nose, the sensuality of the thick lips. But yet, what is the fidelity of carriage, aspect and physiognomy, if you compare to it the expression diffused over this visage, the complexity of sentiments that can be read there! An indefinable smile, made up at once of kindness, raillery and defiance, parts the lips with their sinuous outlines; and the concordance of this smile with the regard, the pose of a towering head, proclaim the indifference to past insults and denials, a lawful contentment with what has been accomplished and a trust in the judgment of posterity.”

Most of the people who, on the opening of the Salon doors, rushed to see the long and impatiently expected statue, committed the initial error of placing themselves quite close to the pedestal and looking straight up at the overhanging block. So examined, the impression was bound to be a disappointing one. In front, the parts of the head most noticeable were the double chin, the under side of the nostrils, and the black cavernous holes of the eyes, with the bristling eyebrows. Of the body, only the foot showed below, and the shape of an arm through the sack-like garment that descended from the shoulder to the ground. Behind, the view, close to, was not less bizarre; the beholder saw what seemed to be little else than a huge pillar leaning towards him and threatening to fall. If, however, he walked a few yards away and took the trouble to gauge his distance, the appearance of the whole changed at once; figure and face became alive. Looked at from either side, both pose and face indicated intense vigour; the view from the left also made it possible to remark the thought-contracted brow, the

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quivering nostril and the meaning of the slightly curled lip. The garment too, at first so opaque, grew transparent, and the simplicity of its arrangement was felt to be intentional.

The majority of visitors to the Salon gave themselves no trouble to find the right perspective. Many of them followed the lead of those who were prejudiced against the sculptor; so that a sort of movement was created, a wave of popular disapproval and mockery, which, if it did not sweep all before it, yet prevented the statue from obtaining any other success than that of publicity. The most intelligent among the unfavourable critics maintained, with such reasoning as they could adduce, that Rodin had tackled a subject too difficult for him, and had not been able to disengage it from the block. Rodin's past achievements were the best refutation of this argument. Other critics lavished abuse, lacking more serious weapons. And the incomprehending part of the public had no better objection than the college student who wrote of the University don :

"I do not like thee, Dr Fell,  
The reason why, I cannot tell,  
But this I know, and know full well,  
I do not like thee, Dr Fell."

The "Société des Gens de Lettres" sided with the majority. Apparently influenced by the first derisive outburst of the crowd, they passed a hurried resolution in the early days of May, in which they protested "against Monsieur Rodin's rough model, and refused to recognise it as a statue of Balzac." The resolution was forwarded to the sculptor, together with an intimation that the Society would neither receive the work nor pay for it—this, notwithstanding the 1894 agreement which bound them to accept what should be delivered.

Rodin's first impulse was to fight the matter out. Unmoved by hostile comments and conscious of his own



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worth as an artist, he was not inclined to adopt any compromise that might be interpreted as an admission of error on his side. Meanwhile, however, other events were preparing. No sooner was the Committee's letter made public than a communication reached him from Monsieur Auguste Pellerin, a well-known, rich art-amateur of Paris, offering to buy the Balzac. For a moment, Rodin was tempted to accept the proposal, since he was seriously out of pocket, and the twenty-thousand francs offered would be a welcome addition to his purse. But there were other competitors in the field. Letters poured in from admirers anxious that the statue should still be erected on a public square, and promising subscriptions for the purpose. A committee of sculptors, painters and other celebrities was formed, with such men as Constantin Meunier, Camille Lefèvre, Bourdelle, Jules Desbois and Lucien Guitry on the list, and the money would easily have been collected. A third proposal came from Brussels, soliciting the honour of possessing the statue.<sup>1</sup>

These various testimonies of esteem were consoling. They also enabled Rodin to reflect more leisurely on the line of conduct he should pursue. Second thoughts convinced him that to drag a work of his art into a court of law, and to make it the subject of legal dispute, would be infinitely distasteful to him. He, therefore, abandoned all idea of a lawsuit. His further decision not to sell the statue to anyone, disappointed a good many; but none were surprised; it was quite in the character of the man. Here are the lines in which he made known his determination:—

“MY DEAR FRIENDS,—The statue of Balzac was ordered from me by the Société des Gens de Lettres for

<sup>1</sup> During the exhibition of the statue at the Salon, a telegram was sent from the International Exhibition of Artists at Knightsbridge, London. It was worded as follows: “It is said, you are withdrawing your Balzac from the Salon. If so, the Council invites you to send it here.”







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a site in Paris, which the Society had obtained from the Town Council. It is to such a destination that my statue is fitted in my thought. This monument is the logical outcome of my artist-career. I take the responsibility of it; and my desire is to remain in possession of it until the day, when, as I have a right to hope, justice will be done to me. I thank you all, my dear friends, for your courageous devotion. It is with real emotion that I beg you to express my gratitude to all those who, in such a valiant way, have testified to me so much sympathy. I consider this, up to now, as my best reward. Let me be content with this manifestation; and ask you to convey my sincerest thanks to such as have joined you, and at the same time my formal wish to remain the sole possessor of my production.—Yours, my dear friends, with deep obligation,

RODIN."

To complete the story, Falguière, who had offered to take up Chapu's succession in 1891, was now entrusted with the commission, and visitors to the Salon a year later were able to see there his presentment of the novelist in plaster. The marble statue was subsequently erected in the Avenue Friedland, near the "Arc de Triomphe," the original site of the "Palais Royal" having been abandoned. The sitting figure, with bowed head, and hands clasped round the crossed knees, which is the rendering Falguière has given, is an ordinary "bourgeois," with little or nothing to characterise him. It is probable enough that some of the opponents of Rodin's work, after their inspection of the substitute, regretted their precipitancy of judgment.

It is equally probable that if Rodin's request for the statue to be cast in bronze had been acted upon, the Committee of the Société des Gens de Lettres and other critics would have perceived the really fine build of the body, and that those things which shocked them in the

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plaster would have appeared quite harmonious and natural in the bronze. Even in the plaster, a wonderful attraction is experienced after lengthened contemplation of the figure. The better the sculptor's intention is understood, the more it is approved. One feels that he has added a culminating perfection to the Gothic style of statuary, with its subservience of form to the idea. To have done this, and yet to have given us the individual, for Balzac is there, a very living Balzac, is the best proof that the conception Rodin endeavoured to execute has not failed in the process.

And so the monument remains, awaiting its hour.

## CHAPTER XIII

### RODIN ON THE ANTIQUE—HIS LETTERS

THIS chapter may be considered as a sequel to the one giving specimens of the sculptor's familiar conversation. In the latter half of it are given portions of a few letters he has written; and, in the former, two short articles, signed with his name, and published in a 1904 number of the *Musée*,<sup>1</sup> a comparatively new bi-monthly magazine devoted to ancient art. These contributions, being the first he has ever made to a review, have a biographical importance, even apart from the subject; and the interest is increased by his being a connoisseur in what he treats of. In fact, they are lectures on his hobby. His small leisure not allowing him to inscribe all the words on paper, they were communicated to the editor of the magazine, Monsieur Georges Toudouze, who took them down in shorthand, and submitted his copy to the author for correction and approval. So the articles are really Rodin's own language and thought. The first one is entitled, "The Lesson of the Antique"; and this is what the sculptor says:—

"First of all, the antique is life itself. There is nothing more living than it, and no style in the world has known how, or been able to interpret life like it.

"The antique knew how to interpret life, because the ancients were the greatest, the most earnest, the most admirable observers of nature that had ever lived.

<sup>1</sup> Published at the address of the Director, Monsieur Arthur Sambon, 6 Rue de Port, Mahon, Paris, by whose kind permission, and that of Monsieur Toudouze, the articles are translated and reproduced here.



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"The antique was able to interpret life, because the ancients, owing to this mastery in the observation of nature, saw what was essential ; that is, the grand planes and the details of these grand planes. They confined themselves to the great shadows given by these grand planes ; and, as the truth itself is there, never have their figures thus constructed been in danger of losing firmness.

"See! Let us take examples. Here is a hawk in stone which was sent me from Egypt—all the details are enveloped, studied as a whole ; and, when I place it like that on my wrist, wouldn't you say that it was going to fly away? This little bronze cat, which is Egyptian too, has not a hair visible, detailed apart, and yet cannot one fancy that, when stroking its back, the velvet of its fur will be felt? Here, again, is an ibis, one of those little bronzes of which Egypt has produced such wondrous examples—there is not one feather, but there is the aggregate of all the feathers in this nervous body stuck up on those two long legs ; and yet look how he walks, look how he is going to fly.

"Ah! those people were *true* !

"In a different way, I grant ; but they were all so in one way or another. The Etruscans are more gloomy, the Greeks gave greater suavity to the shadows, the Egyptians and the Assyrians are more savage. Ah! the Assyrian figures! they are as terrible as tigers.

"So this truth, just see what it yields—that is a hand, a marble hand, which I found at a bric-a-brac dealer's. It is broken off ; it has no fingers, nothing but a palm ; and it is so true that to contemplate it, to see it alive, there is no need of its fingers. Mutilated, it still suffices, because it is true.

"Next, the antique is simple, and that is a great force ; it is simple, and it knows how to simplify, which gives it astonishing energy.

# Rodin on the Antique

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"And then it is much more studied than appears at first sight. I once had an opportunity of realizing this in a practical way. While engaged on my 'Age d'Airain,' I paid a visit to Italy, and I saw there an Apollo, with a leg in exactly the same pose as that of my figure on which I had spent months of labour. I studied it; and remarked that, whereas in surface everything seemed summary, in reality all the muscles were properly constructed, and the details could be distinguished individually. The ancients studied everything by profiles, by all the profiles successively; because in any figure whatsoever, in part of a figure even, no one profile is like another; and it is only by studying them separately that the whole appears simple and living. Thus, for instance, this vase, whose neck resembles the stalk of a leek, is life-like. Why? Because it was made from nature by profiles, whereas we should turn it on a lathe, and should obtain only something stiff and hard. The whole secret lies there.

"In reality, that, let me tell you, is the capital error of the Neo-Greek school. It is not the *type* which is and must be antique, it is the modelling. For want of understanding that, the Neo-Greek school has produced nothing but cardboard.

"It is a bad thing to give the antique to beginners. One ought to finish by the antique, not begin by it. When you want to teach any one to eat, you give him fresh aliments, so that he may learn to crush them. The idea would never occur to you of giving him already masticated food to try his teeth on. Well! when you want to teach any one sculpture, put him in direct contact with nature; and, when he is well versed in nature, you may say to him: Now here is what the antique was able to do. And then the antique will be a source of new energy to him. On the other hand, if you give the antique to a beginner who has never

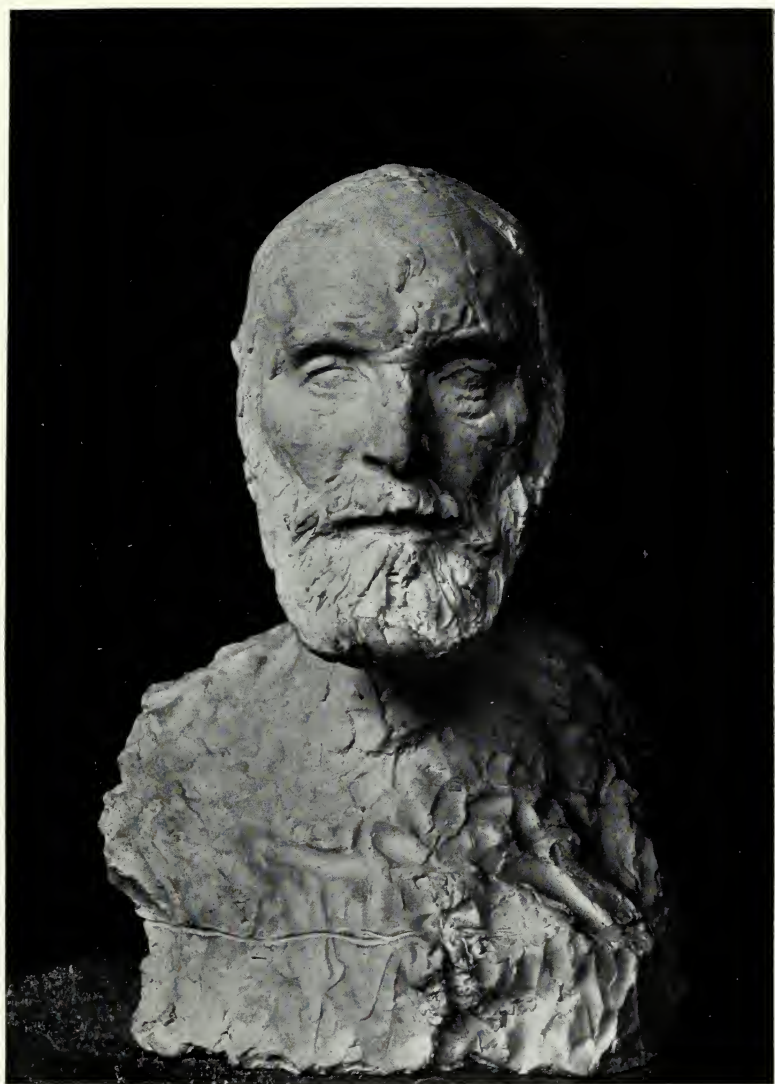
# The Life of Rodin

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grappled directly with nature, he will understand nothing about it, he will lose his own personality, you will make a plagiarist of him ; and, instead of making his own prayer to nature, he will repeat to her the prayer of the antique without understanding its language ; and he will go on doing so all his life, and he will die an old scholar, but not a man.

“To teach the antique at the outset of a person’s studies is to render it incomprehensible. First of all, the antique is not taught ; that is not possible ; this art of truth and simplicity cannot be taught. The sculptor works on nature ; and then, when he has well studied a thing, he goes to the museum, and sees how the antique interpreted what he has just been seeking in front of his living model—that is the truth. But if, with his eyes closed to nature, he goes straight to the antique, our sculptor cannot transport this vision into his work, except as an echo ; so what he makes will be neither antique nor modern—it will be merely bad.

“I told you it was the modelling, not the type, which is antique. Now this is what can be done. In our days, a man may quite well produce the antique, not in the false sense current of *antique type*, but in the true sense of *antique modelling*. Such a man (whether he be a sculptor, a painter, or an engraver, matters little) will take nature, and, if he has the force of the antique, of the veritable antique, he will produce an antique which is altogether different from the spurious antique taught, but in entire agreement, in real relationship with the works in our Museums. Life, nature, the great shadows and planes—that is the antique. Take Carrière, for example. His power lies in his structure. Carrière in his modern art is the true continuer of the antique. These things need to be repeated to the young ; the Neo-Greek school desires them to subject themselves to antique influences. It is doing things backwards ; it is starting from the end.



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Nature first, the antique next. That is the road to follow. You don't give the Divine Comedy or the Legend of the Centuries to children that cannot spell. Life before everything! When one begins with nature, it is possible to go to any lengths, to inventions that are materially the most unlikely. The antique itself is an example. Do you know anything more impossible in nature than the Centaur? Two hearts, two bellies, four lungs! . . . But do you know at Olympia, at the Parthenon anything finer? Those people were so well versed in nature that they became her accomplices and created beings which were not old-looking phantoms, but beings that lived in spite of the impossible physical conditions in which they were forced to live.

"And since it is my opinion on the antique that you wish, this is it. The antique is a sublime thing, because it is a thing that has come straight forth from nature and life. In my opinion, if one studies it badly, one would do better not to study it at all. It is not the artist's alphabet, it is his reward for working. The veritable order it gives us is not to copy it, or to interpret it, but to go and do likewise—which is not the same thing—and by all its works it gives us as a lesson to go only to a single school, the School of Nature.

"That is how I understand the antique and why I love it with passion.

AUG. RODIN."

The second article is upon a statuette of the old collection Gréau in the Naples Museum. Monsieur Toudouze having taken the sculptor a photograph of it, the latter analysed its plastic qualities.

"In the first number of this magazine, I expressed some few ideas which are dear to me, and to which I attach great importance, referring to the antique art that so many young men have wasted their energies in studying, misled by unintelligent commentators. The chance

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which puts into my hands the photograph of this admirable female form allows me to resume my exposition and to continue it, not in a merely theoretic manner, but, on the contrary, in a practical fashion.

“To assert that the antique—the clear portrait of the marvel of life—is beautiful, is to employ an insufficient term, a superficial praise; for beauty is a culminating, not a starting point; and a thing can only be *beautiful*, if it is true: outside of truth, no beauty. Truth itself is nothing more than complete harmony; and harmony is, in fine, only a bundle of utilities. Now, what is the model itself of useful things? It is nature, in which everything has its reason of existence; known or unknown of our limited vision, it matters little. The miracle of life could not be perpetuated without the continual renewing of a universal equilibrium. In nature, everything is therefore a utility; between and above these utilities, reign harmony, general law; because harmonious nature is true, and because true, she is beautiful, eternally and prodigiously beautiful. The people of antiquity felt this immense rhythm; they knelt before it; and their art, inspired by it, modelled on it, appears to us the most natural of harmonies, and consequently a sublime expression of beauty.

“Take the gesture of this woman, who, gently fallen on her two knees, slightly arches her bust. It is beautiful. Why? Because, some commentary will say, the learned art of the sculptor endeavoured to seek and was able to find an elegant attitude which he translated with a sure chisel. An absolute error in my opinion: that system is a procedure of our period, of our time, governed by the employment of the studio model, the worn-out model, stereotyped in twenty-five or thirty conventional poses, like an automaton without life. To-day, too often the school procedure directs the professional model, who in turn directs the docile artist to an imposed tradition. I

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believe that in this woman's statue, there is something quite different. Here, it is nature who has directed the model ; according to the useful and harmonious rhythm that bent her knees and swelled her loins to counter-balance her gesture, a woman set her muscles in movement—a natural woman, a woman like others, and not a professional of the model table, executing the conventional kneeling gesture—and in the presence of this beautiful and simple movement, the sculptor produced this statue.

“So now, to-day, if you wish to understand this work, do not copy it, but turn your back on it, take a woman who happens to be by, make her repeat the gesture, and look at her well. Each muscle moves in turn ; and, in a flash, shows you a new beauty. The thing that stirs in nature is the professor that comes and explains to you. Then everything becomes calm again. It is finished ; but you have understood, you have done better than penetrate into the exterior construction of this piece of marble ; you have for a moment lived over again the impression of him who originally produced it.

“Great supple lines are the resultants of the harmony you caught a glimpse of, two thousand years after the sculptor. He felt them so well that his work is a small living world by its force and its equipoise. And then, without his knowing why, or any one else, simply because the relations of the profiles were well co-ordinated, because the geometry of forms exercised a magical and irresistible enchantment, the living soul of this woman, long disappeared, came to inhabit for ever this marble statuette that represents her. Criticism calls that eloquence, emotion,—words empty of meaning ; in reality, it is soul which is fixed there, immortalized by truth.

“If now you wish to study by what means the artist constructed this pure piece of universal truth, nothing is more easy.

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"It is perfectly useless to drag in here laws, rules, principles which have germinated only in the brains of commentators dissecting a series of works twenty centuries afterwards, and of which no artist ever dreamed. It is equally useless to employ a vocabulary bristling with words forged on purpose and understood by hardly any one. In art, the most difficult things are explained with words you may hear in the street. Here you have neither laws, nor outlandish words. A man has made this statue. How did he set about it?

"We certainly shall not come to know it by studying the antique; even if we were to study this for twenty years, we should know only the nomenclature, but not its spirit. As indeed in order to understand all styles, we must begin by studying nature. Rembrandt is not to be understood by copies made at the Louvre. The comprehension is reached only through nature. It is not by addressing ourselves to the antique that we shall understand this great consciousness that has descended to us from so far; it is by addressing ourselves to his inspiration.

"Now nature, kind nature, is always at hand, patiently waiting for some one to reproduce the antique. The model she offers is at hand too, the same as before, alive and waiting for some one to come at last, no matter from where. For it is a mistake to fancy that the antique is of the south. It is of everywhere; the antique may be reproduced with a Dutch or an American woman, the type being nothing, and the model being all.

"It is pretended that Ingres used to say: 'Make the two profiles, and put inside them what you will.' The error was a huge one. Nature contradicts it point-blank; our statuette also, being here to prove that what constitutes the essence of the antique is the truth of *all* the lines. A single glance at the figure we are considering will show that the marvellous truthfulness of it lies in







FLIGHT OF LOVE  
(see page 229)

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the union of the profiles of all the sides. In the full light, the lines forming the front surface are only seen as one walks round it. To the superficial observer they do not stand clearly out, but the artist realises the union; and, although the eye may not seize the whole of the form, it knows that the form is there, and that, being present, truth is there also. If certainty is desired, the study of each profile will furnish an irrefutable proof.

"Hence, this body of the woman has become an admirable living thing, of sublime harmony, and of a rhythm of utility which contains an infinite grace that charms us. The sculptor gave the woman free action. Unlike us, he took care not to disturb the harmony of nature. Only, as all the ancients, in order to show the light with greater intensity, he slightly exaggerated the half-tints. This procedure will be best comprehended by placing a moulding from nature by the side of an antique, the moulding appears more meagre compared with the antique rendered more puissant through the slight exaggeration.

"In this marble, there is nothing which is not simplicity itself, for nature at bottom is very simple in her beauty; but, in this geometric beauty, life is contained. The woman is in reality nude, since it is the silhouettes of her suave ample form which shine, and the garment that covers her is also alive, not of itself, for it is not natural that a drapery should have a will, but because it receives its movement from the nude, because, living with the body, it lives like the body and the body's simple movement. There is no need, indeed, to explain matters by the trick of wet drapery, which, in this particular case, would form circles in every direction, but which has not been done. Loïe Fuller recently obtained the same effect without needing to wet her draperies.

"And now, shall we seek for similar attitudes to those

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of this statue? What would be the use of it? Such comparisons are most often a factitious cataloguing which abandons the substantial for the shadow; for, if the antique was passionately fond of repeating the same models, it never repeated the same modelling. But the modelling is just the important thing.

"To this work may well be applied the term *morbidezza*, which expresses with such fulness of meaning the life it contains. We have here a *morbidezza* of Correggio.

"There is in this piece of marble an astonishing mystery of life which effaces all thought of size. The figure is only a few centimetres large; it might just as well be life-size, proving once more that when a thing is well organised, the size is in the fashioning not in the dimensions. Thus, for instance, if the Eiffel Tower and a Tanagra were to be photographed, and the two proofs were shown to some one that knew neither the one object nor the other, I am sure he would declare the Tanagra was larger than the Eiffel Tower; for it is truth which is great, not dimension. A pear, an apple, from the modelling point of view, are as large as the celestial sphere.

"This radiance of truth is such that, finding no word to interpret it, we have called it ideal.

"Now, if I am asked what this statue is, I must confess that I don't care. Is it a nymph of the waters? If you like. In reality, I should be tempted to think that, when caressing this piece of sculpture, the sculptor was seeking nothing else—and that was sufficient—than to interpret the mystery of nature. He did so with such power that it gives us spectators ideas; and the ideas that are ours we fancy, by transposing them, to be those of the artist.

"The antique, which did not understand what we call '*fineness*,' and which understood only structure, both largely and strongly conceived, had, in fine, an imagina-

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tion (in the sense we give to this word) inferior to its supreme passion for truth, to its exalted love of the human form, which, like nature in the aggregate, seemed to it celestial.

“And in terminating, one cannot fail to perceive one thing, namely, that the commentary of antique art is an eternal repetition of the same words — life, nature, harmony. But is not repetition study itself, which never changes, yet increases each day a little more?<sup>1</sup>

“AUG. RODIN.”

It would be an exaggeration to attribute to Rodin's letter-writing the same importance as to his spoken thought in familiar utterance with a friend or sympathetic listener. In his fingers, the pen is less docile than the modelling chisel. But, on the other hand, there is so much revelation of character in the short pithy notes which his friends have received from him by dozens, and also frequently such felicitous phrases, that not to give some quotations would make this sketch of the sculptor's life and work less representative.

One of his earliest correspondents, after returning to Paris from Brussels, was, of course, Roger Marx, for whose support in his hard-fighting period he felt most grateful. Writing to him in December 1887, he said :

“What pleases me is that with you nothing is capricious, everything proceeds from faith in art, which you instinctively love with passion. Consequently, my dear friend, I am happy in your friendship, which will be lasting; for I shall benefit by your ardent aspiration towards the art of expression which you desire.”

There is a previous letter, dated November 1885, with

<sup>1</sup> Another article on “The Gothic in French Cathedrals and Churches” was published in 1905 in the February number of the *North American Review*. This article was taken down by a shorthand writer under Mr Rodin's dictation, and translated by the author of the biography.

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a trifle of discouragement and satire in it, and containing its own explanation.

"You hardly suspect the apropos of what you have published in the '*Progrès Artistique*,' and dedicated to me. For you know that my friend G—— wanted to sell something of mine to a large firm, and yet all he sees in my studio would not please. So you see what a pity it is not to have talents for the service of large firms and rich amateurs. There will remain, therefore, only men of letters and artists who are not afraid, and who, like you, my dear friend, will take what is my preference in sculpture."

In December 1887, he wrote a second time, with mention of the painter Puvis de Chavannes, whose "Poor Fisherman" the State had acquired on Monsieur Marx's recommendation.

"I have seen Puvis de Chavannes; he called at the studio, joyous as a child to see my studies, which pleased me I can't tell you how much. But I don't think he would have chosen as well as you, as regards his own exhibition, wishing, as he did, a museum canvas, which has no meaning, whereas the 'Poor Fisherman' is his very soul."

Illustrative of the change that coincided with his going to live in the country is a paragraph indited in 1892.

"For the evening, I have carried my weakness to the extent of suppressing the regulation dinner at home, everything being ordered in view of the morrow's work."

Quite a recent letter addressed from Florence on the 2nd of November 1902, throws additional light on his sentiment towards the ancient and modern. He exclaims:

"How is it that in Italy great artists are so great in the street that their name is in the mouth of all, and that in France it is almost the contrary? Our masterpieces of architecture all ought to be defended. But our ignorant committees are monstrous and kill in the name of art. I



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feel it restful to see the love of this country for its gods, Dante, Donatello, Michael Angelo, Perugini. The peoples of the north still have a trace of barbarism. Just think of Shakespeare unknown; of Beethoven and Rembrandt dying in poverty as the sun dies in the fog. How good this love (of the Italians for their masters) seems to me! Methinks I am at home, the real home. Ah! the primitives! what peace comes from them! Oh! travellers! who are weary for want of something to do, come and look! Begin to live. All the old time is misunderstood. Look at it! Pardon me, my friend, all this, which is not in my means of expression."

Unfortunately the early letters addressed to Mr Natorp are dispersed. A selection from them would have been the proper complement of this old friend and pupil's reminiscences. In place of this, two of later date may be given, since there is an allusion to the long-standing intimacy: The first is dated September the 6th 1897.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—Your letter and what it contains is very flattering to me. Indeed, I have always been charmed with your real friendship. It is true we have a like taste in sculpture. . . . The fine portrait that Legros painted of me has come back; and is one of the things I most value. . . . And you, dear friend, have your plans been partly realised, and have you some sculpture at the Academy this year? I am staying with my friend Fenaille who published the drawings.

CHÂTEAU DE MONTROZIER, AVEYRON."

The second is an answer to Christmas wishes, and bears the date of the 23rd of December 1900.

"MY DEAR NATORP,—You are faithful to your old professor. I am pleased and touched by your kindness to me. I wish you also a Merry Christmas, and recall the time when we used to do sculpture together. You

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are the only one of my pupils to keep up the 'Auld Lang Syne,' and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. . . . My own affairs have succeeded, especially from a moral point of view. Purchases have been made by foreign museums, for example, in Germany and in Copenhagen. I shall drink to your health on Christmas day.—Your friend,  
RODIN."

A few letters have come into the present writer's hands addressed by Rodin to a friend who prefers to remain anonymous. His name is mentioned in the book elsewhere as one of the men who have been for years with the master both in evil and in good days, and who received sincere recognition of their fidelity. The first letter is dated the 29th of June 1884, and marks the beginning almost of the intimacy.

"... You know," Rodin writes, "how happy your sympathy makes me. It seems to me you have been my friend for a long time; and I write to you without seeking for phrases, as a plain man, in full cordiality. But if my literature is weak, I join a little sketch to divert the attention. . . ."

In a second he speaks of an accident or a failure in his work.

"... An unfortunate thing has happened to me. I thought I had finished my woman's bust yesterday, and I have ruined it. It will have to be begun over again. Three weeks lost! Ah! how annoying! . . . I begin to be afraid; and must now work hard. When I leave the studio, my ideas, like birds, are too slow in coming back; and I spend whole days in trying after an effect. . . ."

A third letter written in May 1885 shows how close the friendship had become.

"... It is another sentiment, more than thanks, which for some time I have felt towards you. Our like tastes and judgments are a bond of union between us. I should



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be pleased for you to have some little thing of my sculpture, being certain that in your literary execution there must be the same minute work that you attribute to me. . . ."

A fourth, dated the 6th of September 1891, refers to the Balzac.

". . . And yet, friend, if I did not work hard at my Balzac, I should be bored. We toilers with the hand cannot do with an indefinitely prolonged enjoyment of pleasure. We are like the falcon (who must go a-hunting and bring back what he finds)—and need to be kept on the alert if we are to be cheerful. I am making as many models as possible for the construction of the head, with types in the country ;<sup>1</sup> and, with the abundant information I have secured, and am still procuring, I have good hope of the Balzac. . . ."

A fifth in February 1892, comments on an article written by his friend in the *Figaro*.

". . . What precision without emphasis! It is one of your qualities. To be true and simply that. The article will create you enemies, but you will be stronger than them all by being always as true. Truth has an eternal constraining power. . . ."

The last quotation is from a letter, dated the 12th of October 1900, and was called forth partly by the reading of another of his friend's publications.

". . . I think that you and I are all the same, succeeding in obtaining a hearing from that deaf collectivity—the public, badly directed it is true, and which turns like a weathercock, repeating two or three words, always the same. Dante has given a circle in hell of them, making them insignificant shades all similar. . . . In the pleasure I experienced when reading your note, I could not help reviving the episodes of our journey, dear

<sup>1</sup> Where Balzac lived.



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companion, I carrying my wallet of heavy tools, and you more lightly laden but yet more full of care. . . .”

To Henley, from the beginning of their correspondence, Rodin wrote with great cordiality; and, in each succeeding letter, the tone of familiar confidence was maintained or increased. One of the '80 decade letters confirms information given as to the way in which the Victor Hugo bust was made.

“ . . . He has not—what is called—posed; but I have lived with him, lunching or driving or frequenting his soirées for the last four months, with the bust at his house, which allowed me to work there always. Sometimes I was with him whole afternoons, but I did not have him as a model that one places as is most convenient for the purpose. . . .”

Another of the same period contains Rodin's preference on the choice of a photograph.

“ . . . I have sent you a photograph, which seems to me a very good one. It is one that I should choose for engraving. As it is black, I have sent a paler one, so that the engraver may discover the details he would not see on the black copy; but the dark one is the most effective; and the beauty of its powerful impression, like a Rembrandt, pleases me exceedingly. . . .”

Undated also, as the two preceding, the following letter is one of those brief expressions of feeling characteristic of the master.

“MY DEAR HENLEY,—I am very happy to hear from you, and your note delighted me. Think of me sometimes like that, and send me news about yourself, your beautiful daughter, and Madam Henley. Engrave, my dear friend, I am glad that in England I am not losing the small reputation I have already.—Yours, RODIN.”

Writing some ten years later, on the 4th of November

## Rodin on the Antique

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1898, after the episode of the Balzac statue, the sculptor unbosoms himself without reserve.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—You have written me a letter which has deeply stirred our old friendship. We have both reached the same reflection ; our lives are, in truth, somewhat similar ; and I have had, too, terrible sufferings in affection. Profound, pleasureless melancholy has come upon me. The struggle I must carry on still wears me out ; and yet I am so proud that I cannot degrade myself, which, however, would be the only way of escaping from my embarrassments. What a sorry time we live in !

"Some believe in progress because there are telephones, steamers, etc.; but all that is only an improvement of the arm, the leg, the eye, the ear. Who shall improve the soul, which will soon disappear ?

"My dear friend, I don't know how I have managed not to live and have a reputation that another more cute than I would render so lucrative. Moreover, I find that the length of the struggle tells on me. How I wish I could have my child's soul and fairy religion of yore to uphold me ! My dear friend, I envy you if you have still your pen at the service of your thoughts. . . . I congratulate you (on your book). We have the misfortunes that come with age ; but you have compensations ; and the respect shown to you by your younger contemporaries who accept your advice is no common thing. Good-bye, my dear great friend.—Affectionately yours, RODIN.

"P.S.—And our friend Stevenson who was so dear, also lost on the way, leaving only his glorious name !"

Two Christmas letters in 1901 and 1902 are full of delicate sentiment. In the first we read :

". . . I am happy to send you the expression of my faithful and admiring friendship. You know how far life is spent from one's friends and, as it were, at the galleys,

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where there are always intruders at one's heels. It refreshes me to write to you with the hope that your health may be re-established, undermined as it has been by the loss of your daughter. You were inconsolable, dear friend; and it is more than a man's strength can bear to always remember his misfortunes. . . ."

The second begins :

"MY DEAREST POET,—I always write to you with the feelings of a brother. You have been so generous, so faithful to the friendship you bear me; your life is so artistic and poetic; . . . everything in your home yields matter for thought, just as your life with its energy and admirable character. Accept my best wishes, ardent and sincere, for yourself and Madam Henley. . . ."

The last letter penned by Rodin would seem to be a farewell to his dying friend. It is dated the 6th of July 1903.

". . . From my heart to my faithful friend Henley. How well I remember your sweet home and Madam Henley's affection for you. You have also your thought, dear friend, which animates you, and, through your poetry, England. To you, glorious thinker, your old friend who loves you.

AUGUSTE RODIN."

## CHAPTER XIV

### RELATIONS WITH AMERICA—THE SARMIENTO MONUMENT

JUST at the time when the *Affaire Balzac* was beginning to enter into its acute stage, in other words, in January 1894, Rodin received an intimation from Buenos Ayres that his name had been brought forward in connection with a proposed monument to the late<sup>1</sup> Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, who was President of the Argentine Republic between 1868 and 1874, and had died in 1888. It was especially the educational philanthropist that the Argentines wished to honour, most of Sarmiento's life having been devoted to promoting the instruction of the young and increasing the number of schools.

The first intermediary between the Buenos Ayres Committee and the sculptor was an Argentine business man residing in Paris, whose name was Marco del Pont. After a preliminary exchange of inquiries there was an interval of nearly twelve months before real negotiations commenced. Rodin's experiences with the Chili monuments had made him cautious, and he had stipulated conditions that would not leave him at the mercy of events. About the close of 1894, the following communication was handed him, through the Paris proxy, from Señor del Valle, who was Chairman of the Buenos Ayres Committee :

<sup>1</sup> Born at San Juan, 1811. Forced to emigrate to Chili in 1842 ; created there the first normal school in South America. Persecuted in Chili, he travelled in Europe ; returned to Argentine, and was elected senator in 1860. Minister in 1861, Ambassador to Chili in 1864, to the United States in 1865.

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"Beg Monsieur Rodin to re-read Sarmiento's biography, and tell him what an exceptional man Sarmiento was, and how deserving of the monument to be erected to him, as of the effort of the sculptor's artistic genius. To my mind, the figure on the pedestal ought to be the expression of intelligent force. Sometimes, Sarmiento himself said that his book, "El Facundo," was like a rock of the Andes with which he had destroyed barbarism in the Argentine Republic; and, as his whole career was spent in this struggle for civilisation, I think we might give material form to the idea by representing a Titan boldly hurling a huge piece of rock. In order that the allegory may not be taken as the expression of mere physical force, it would suffice for the artist to put into the features an expression of high intelligence. I think also that the statue should be represented standing in an attitude and gesture that would convey the impression of strength in repose, the concentration of the intimate thought of a man of action who was also a thinker. The bas-relief might have as its subject Sarmiento as an educator with young children around him. Tell Monsieur Rodin that half a million men are indebted to his influence for their knowledge of reading and writing."

The preceding document has been quoted at length, partly for the details furnished on the subject of the statue, and partly as a reference to prove that the sculptor pondered on the hints given and profited by them in his execution. The suggestion about the rock-throwing he did not see his way to accept. It would have been a hopeless task to put a stone in a man's hand, and idealise the casting of it. His proposal was for the pedestal to allegorise Sarmiento's achievement by a combination of the Apollo and Hercules myths, and to represent the sun-god as vanquishing the crawling snakes of error and ignorance. This project was ultimately adopted, as





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appears from clauses of the agreement drafted in August 1895 :—

“The monument,” we read, “shall comprise a bronze figure, two metres high, representing Señor Sarmiento, and a pedestal, five metres high. One part of the pedestal shall consist of a single block of white marble, three metres and a half high, with a figure on it in full relief, representing Apollo fighting with a hydra. The crowning portion of the pedestal shall be of another piece of marble, but of the same quality. The arms of the Argentine Republic shall be placed behind the pedestal. A basement, one and a half metres high, shall complete the monument.”

The total price to be paid to the sculptor was seventy-five thousand francs, the most he had yet received for any work public or private, but not large, considering that he had to find all the material and pay all incidental expenses, save the transport to South America. Three and a half years were fixed as the limit for the completion of the work, and the money, which was to be paid by instalments during its progress, was, in the first instance, deposited with a cousin of Señor Marco del Pont's, bearing the same name. The agreement was signed on the 30th of November, and, as soon as might be after, a commencement was made.

In spite of the sculptor's precautions about the payment, difficulties cropped up in the course of 1896, which for a short time threatened to disorganise everything. The Buenos Ayres Committee, deeming it preferable that the money should be deposited at the Crédit Lyonnais Bank rather than with a private person, requested Señor Marco del Pont to give up possession of the sum remaining in his hands, and as the latter demurred, legal proceedings were taken. However, this cloud blew over, the dispute was satisfactorily terminated; and a new proxy was appointed in Paris, to wit, the Argentine

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Minister, Señor Miguel Cané. The latter took great interest in what Rodin was doing; and spoke to him even of another projected monument in Buenos Ayres—that of General Belgrano—the fee being one hundred and forty thousand francs; but, for some reason or other, the matter did not go any further. Like Señor del Valle, the minister seems to have had very pronounced opinions as to what the statue should or should not be, and formulated them, amicably but bluntly, in his interviews with Rodin and his letters to him.

“You tell me that Sarmiento’s figure is practically finished,” he wrote on the 16th of October 1896; “I hope that you have paid attention to the observations I made you on the subject of the physical type of the personage, and that now I shall see the true Sarmiento.”

This letter has its importance, as its author alluded to it pointedly in a correspondence that took place when the monument arrived at its destination. Probably a little nervous on account of the sculptor’s delay in delivering his Balzac, Señor Cané also wrote frequently to ask if one or another part were ready. Whether his reminders accelerated the progress or not, Rodin terminated his undertaking within about the period laid down; and, in the last months of the century, the huge mass—the marble alone weighing at least twenty tons—was shipped off to South America. Señor Cané had quitted Paris definitely in the autumn of 1898; so he was on the other side to superintend the disembarking and the conveyance of the monument to the spot where it was to be erected. The site was a plot of ground close to the crossing of two avenues in the capital, one bearing the hero’s name; trees bordered the inter-spaces and a fountain adorned the centre of the cross roads. In his lengthy epistle announcing the arrival, Señor Cané, with unconscious prophecy, said: “Nobody yet knows what the effect of the whole will be; but, at any rate, I am quite tranquil.

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Some people will say stupid things about the President's figure, and others won't understand a word of the allegory ; but we don't care for such folks, do we?"

The unveiling ceremony took place on the 25th of May ; and, as a fact, many stupid things were said anent the statue and the sculptor. It was a repetition of the old conflict between the notion which ordinary persons had formed about a given face and character and the notion which an extraordinary artist had formed of him. Funnily enough, Señor Cané himself turned round and became a blasphemer, not coarsely but very decidedly. In an account of the inauguration proceedings which he despatched to Paris on the 27th of May, he reproached Rodin with having paid no heed to his recommendations. The explanation of this sudden change was the unfavourable reception accorded to Rodin's work by the majority of the Committee, and an evident desire to disengage his own responsibility. He informed the "master and friend," as he still called him, that the critics judged the eyes too small, the hair too abundant, the forehead too receding, the aspect too ape-like, and—like the good inhabitants of Nancy—the chief figure too meagre for the proportions of the pedestal. Naïvely, Señor Cané added that none the less he considered the whole was a fine piece of sculpture, and that he wondered if the surrounding shrubbery could not be modified so as to conduce to a better effect.

What the former minister expressed with politeness was expressed with more vulgar emphasis in an effusion preserved by Rodin as a literary curiosity: "I say, my good fellow," it began, "what were you thinking of? You surely said to yourself: 'The Argentines are a lot of savages. It will be good enough for them!' Not at all. You've been squinting. The Argentines are not what you fancy in France. You said to yourself: 'I see it like that'; and you wouldn't listen to the Com-



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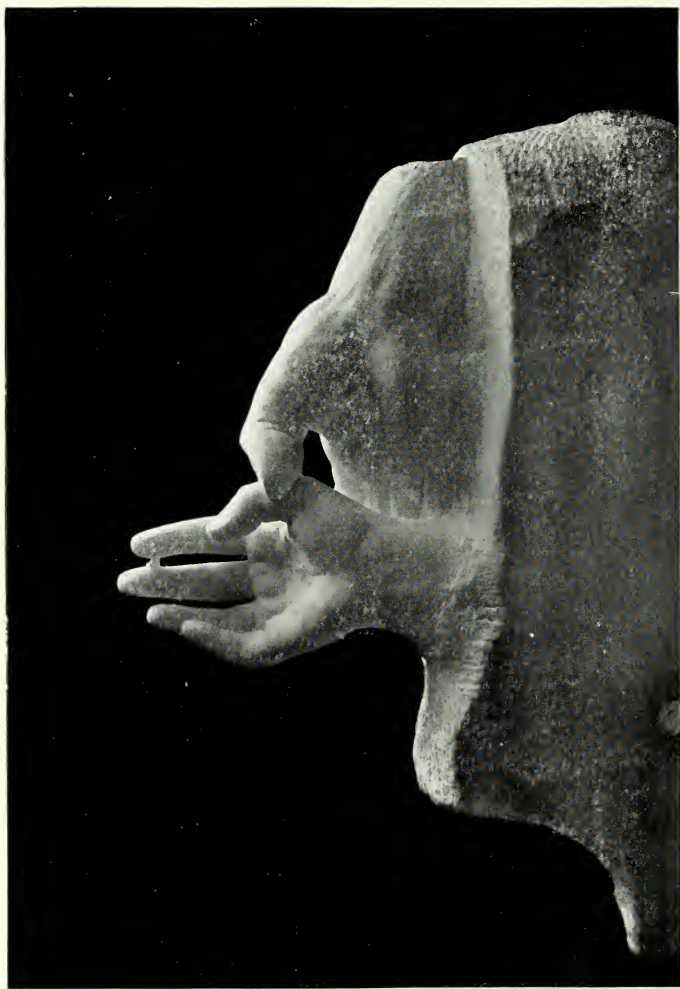
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mittee's recommendations. 'Bah! a lot of savages.' I say, my good fellow, what should you think if a sculptor, commissioned to put you into marble, bronze, or chocolate, should twist your long and venerable beard into the form of a serpent, like that of Mr Moses? The gentleman (not Moses) might say, in turn: 'It's like that I see Gaffer Rodin.' What could you reasonably object. His argument would be worth yours. Be persuaded by me. Go and sin—I mean sculpt no more.—Yours, etc."

From the preceding gentle writer and Señor Cané's language, it is plain they imagined that since the sculptor had not obeyed every single word of advice proffered by sincere but unskilled persons, he must have despised all they had said. The *non sequitur* is patent. His habit, on the contrary, is always to carefully listen to opinions, like Apelles, but also, like Apelles, sometimes to reply. *Ne sutor ultra crepidam*. In this particular case, never having seen Sarmiento, he was only too anxious to procure all possible information as to the man's person and character. Two photographs sent to him, at his request, in 1896, by an old friend of the President, living in London, were studied with the greatest care; but, in reproducing the likeness, he had to consider the impression it would make under the perspective of its exposure in the light of the open sky. He had aimed at a resemblance that would convey and maintain an illusion of living energy, and certain photographic details were of necessity slightly modified.

Competent critics were not lacking to justify the sculptor's interpretation. Señor Schiaffino, Director of the National Museum of Fine Arts in Buenos Ayres, affirmed: "No one of those who knew Sarmiento or examined, during his life, any of his portraits will hesitate in recognising our great man at first sight." Another wrote: "The artist has not failed in the historic truth which is imposed on all. He has dealt freely with





SPECIMEN OF HAND SCULPTURE  
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material exactitude, in order to aggrandise his hero and raise the soul of his contemporaries." Señor Cané's own fault-finding was confined to the head, which he considered small compared with the body, and more especially referred to the eyes, which he comically complained were two holes hollowed out below the forehead. Apparently, he would have liked glass eye-balls.

Used to objections against his art from people who formulate opinions overweeningly and with little reflection, Rodin replied conciliatingly, and offered to model a new head,<sup>1</sup> a proposal which was eagerly accepted by Señor Cané, as it allowed him to shuffle off the rôle of the scape-goat, which he had to some extent played.

The Buenos Ayres *Revista Técnica* for the month of June 1900, gave an illustrated supplement containing four plates—engravings of the monument and its various parts. The first was a general view both of the monument and of the site; the second, the head and upper body of the statue in profile; the third, the pedestal with its allegory; and the fourth, the whole statue of Sarmiento seen from the front. Putting aside the question of material resemblance as sufficiently treated, there is something to be said about the rest and all the rest. The figure of the President stands at ease, the weight of his body supported on the left leg, the right leg and foot bent outwards; the left hand, which grasps a scroll, hanging down against the thigh, the right arm lifted to the breast flap of his buttoned frock coat in a gesture that shows the back of the hand and fingers. An ample cloak hangs behind from shoulders to feet; the neck is enclosed by a loose collar and tie; and the head—the much maligned head—which bespeaks a good-looking, strong and straight-nosed, heavy-jawed type, sits lissomly and limberly, raised a little and a little forward, in an attitude at once appro-

<sup>1</sup> So far arrangements have not been concluded, and the original head remains.

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priate and agreeable. The top of the cranium is bald, and what hair clings round the sides is sufficient only to be visible ; those who would fain have had him with less could hardly have been contented without a monk's crown. Seen from the front, the eyes are full of kind, shrewd intelligence ; while the parlous lips are pursed with a half smile. No trace of disproportion between the head and trunk strikes the unbiassed observer. What he does notice is the animation of the whole figure, the finely calculated and designed curve, inwards from head to hip, and outwards from hip to heel, the congruous draping and creasing of the clothes, and, in fine, the fashioning of the hands, classed even by a hostile critic among the "admirable details" he acknowledged in the statue.<sup>1</sup> The white marble pedestal, with its Apollo, is a most dazzling vision of sculpture. An original rough-plaster model preserved at Meudon together with photographs, makes it quite possible to get an adequate idea of the execution. The nude figure of the god stands out on the uneven background of cloud and shadow, casting it behind him with an upward and downward slant of his wide-extended arms. With legs astride, and ready to move onward, he crushes one of the crawling snakes in his right hand, and spurns others with his foot. Comparing it with the Apollo of the Nancy monument, a resemblance may be traced in the face and in the forward impulse of the body, but there is no repetition ; the theme is taken up again only to receive a fresh treatment, and to be applied, perhaps as no other allegory could, splendidly to the facts of the President's career.

Rodin's opinion is that much of the agitation which the inauguration of his Sarmiento provoked in Buenos Ayres, was fostered by a feeling of irritation that such a

<sup>1</sup> Monsieur Léon Maillard, who speaks briefly of the President's figure which he saw in the studio, evidently found it a fine piece of workmanship, and so characterises it in his book on Rodin.



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monument had been executed abroad and not been entrusted to a sculptor of Argentine nationality. Allowance must be made for a sentiment of this order, which cannot be altogether condemned. Those whom it may interest to read at length the pros and the cons in criticism which were published at the time, will do well to consult the articles of Señor Schiaffino in the *Nacion* of the 24th and 25th of May 1900, and the reply of Señor Enrique Chanourdie in the June *Revista Tecnica* of the same year. More pertinent to this biography is the letter written by Señor Schiaffino to the sculptor in 1889. He says:—

“ILLUSTRIOUS MASTER,—I address myself to you to know if there is still time and a way to obtain for the Buenos Ayres National Museum of Fine Arts — the sculpture section of which is now being formed—the plaster models of the allegory for the Sarmiento monument, ‘Apollo, the Vanquisher,’ and that of Sarmiento’s statue. I beg you will kindly give me information about the matter, for I should be very glad to place these valuable copies before our visitors.

“Our museum is not yet in a position to ask you for one of the marble pieces of statuary like those I had opportunities of admiring when I was in Paris between 1885 and 1891, and was studying painting under the direction of my regretted master Pierre Puvis de Chavannes and Monsieur Raphael Collin. The ‘Age d’Airain,’ the ‘St John,’ the ‘Bourgeois de Calais,’ the ‘Head of a young woman’ at the Luxembourg, a glimpse at your works in two exhibitions at the Georges Petit Gallery made on me a deep impression. I owe to you, O Master, the joy of having understood the grandeur, charm and beautiful suffering concealed in clay, stone or bronze. I then had the happiness of transmitting my admiration for you to my noble friend, the late del Valle, who was chairman of the Sarmiento statue Committee. Del Valle

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had never seen any of your productions; but his mind was so largely open to the things of art that it sufficed for me to show him some copies; the reading of Gustave Geffroy's fine studies did the rest. Del Valle was purposing to ask you for a marble reproduction of the *Baiser* when death took him from us.

"As for us, not now being able to ask you for a fine stone original to put in our museum, I should like at least to place there a drawing of yours. Not knowing the price, I do not dare to send a sum of money; allow me to ask you what one would cost—the one you would choose to see figure in our collections. . . . Please also tell me if it would be possible to obtain a plaster copy of your bust of Puvis de Chavannes, of the group 'The Ravishment,' or the 'Baiser.'—Sincerely and admiringly yours."

To this Rodin replied promising satisfaction to the requests after the preparation of his 1900 exhibition was complete. The articles of Señor Schiaffino, and another letter in June 1900, relative to the drawings and casts, prove that his views had undergone no change, and that after the erection of the Sarmiento monument, as before it, he was the sculptor's devoted supporter. With this testimony the subject may be left, the closing word being that of the master, who, scrupulously anxious for truth and fair in his self-judgment, admits that no-likeness can be so unerringly exact as that which is obtained by the artist from the living model. In spite of Schiaffino's assertion that the portrait was physically true, he regrets that it could not have been fashioned from the life. The concession on this point, however, takes nothing from the worth of the execution, which, it is hoped, will be done justice to when time has buried resentment and the monument has stood long enough to be regarded as an old friend.





FRANCESCA AND PAOLO  
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Considering the warm interest shown by the United States in French art and literature, and the pleasure with which eminent Frenchmen are received there, one cannot but regret that Rodin should never have crossed the Atlantic and given Americans an opportunity of welcoming him on their own territory. His relations with the United States began only a year or two later than with England, and almost in the same way. In the middle of the 'eighties, two Americans sought him out in Paris, and made themselves acquainted at first hand with the man and his art. The one was T. H. Bartlett, the Boston sculptor, who, after his return to the United States, spread Rodin's fame abroad among his countrymen. A most comprehensive and appreciative article was published by him in the *American Architect* in 1889. The other was W. E. Brownell, the art critic, who wrote a separate study on the French master, and subsequently devoted other pages to him in his book on French art.

Rodin sent several specimens of his statuary in plaster to the Chicago Exhibition of 1893. There was the magistrate of the "Bourgeois de Calais," which afterwards went to the Chicago Museum. And there was the group "Francesca and Paola," with its companion group "The Baiser." Besides, according to the *Chicago Sunday Herald* of October the 1st, there was "Andromeda." This name does not figure in any of the catalogues, and Rodin does not remember what work is indicated. He believes he sent his group "Metamorphosis of Ovid," but that the authorities refused to exhibit it. What is undoubted—the *Herald* relates it—is that both the "Baiser" and the "Francesca and Paola" were put into a private room, to which visitors were admitted only by special application.

About the same time, the well-known American, Mr Yerkes, bought two fine pieces of the sculptor's statuary, which have never been reproduced. The one is "Cupid



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and Psyche." In this group the god is in the act of leaving Psyche for mistrusting him, and she is endeavouring to retain him as he flies. The second is "Orpheus and Eurydice." Another group of the same name is at present in the museum at Meudon. It shows the Thracian poet and musician, lyre in hand, stooping under the burden of his woe and desolation. His wife has been promised him by the gods; but he has not seen her or touched her, and finds it hard to believe that she can be restored to him. Meanwhile, the shade Eurydice comes hovering on the air behind him. The Orpheus of the Yerkes collection stands at the issue of Hades, represented by a wall of rocky background. So far he has observed the command not to look back at his beloved, but she, following behind, insists with reproaches; and he, powerless to resist longer, raises his hand to his eyes, feeling that he is going to lose her again. Both executions are marked with a wonderfully tender sentiment.

During the last ten years, great attention has been given to the master in America, both by writers and lecturers; and American students in Paris have been eager to profit by his advice and example. In the last edition of his "French Art," Mr Brownell records one or two utterances of the sculptor, which are interesting to note. Speaking of style, he (the sculptor) says: "Unless it is something wholly uncharacterisable, it is a vague and impalpable spirit, breathing through the work of some strongly marked individuality, or else it is formalism." In answer to a question whether the anatomic in sculpture did not involve a risk of the artistic being lost in the scientific, Rodin said: "Yes, for a mediocre artist." A saying of Mr Brownell himself is a happy characterisation. "Rodin," he exclaims, "reveals rather than constructs beauty."

To the St Louis Exhibition in 1904 only one piece of





ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

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statuary was sent—"The Thinker." However great the impression made by a single work, it is inadequate to-day to convey a just idea of the scope and varied excellence of the master's production. It is to be hoped that the series of busts executed in recent years for Americans of both sexes—Mrs Potter-Palmer's is one of the latest—will lead to a thoroughly representative Rodin exhibition in Boston or New York. America should not be any less capable of organising one than the European countries, and the gain and stimulus to American art would be great.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE PAVILION AND THE EXHIBITION YEAR OF 1900

DURING the Great Exhibition year of 1900, there might be seen at one corner of the Place de l'Alma and close to the Exhibition gates, yet outside them, a simple-looking oblong structure with a portico, in reality an iron framework filled in so as to have the appearance of stone; it was between forty and fifty feet high, and its sixteen lofty windows and glass roof made it an abode of light. If anyone asked what this building was, he was told that it was Rodin's Pavilion of sculpture. On entering, he could count in the various rooms, formed and draped with light yellowish curtains, no fewer than one hundred and seventy-one pieces of statuary, either in bronze, or marble, or plaster casts; in fact, nearly all the sculptor's productions. The idea was Rodin's own—at any rate, in its practical form. Standing, as he had always done, apart from the orthodox school, it seemed to him that the occasion was a propitious one to assert his own position, not with any intention of puffing himself, but with the desire that his work, thus gathered into a whole, should be judged for what it was worth. The estimated price of the finished construction was eighty thousand francs. If enough people could be got to pay their franc, the money laid out would be recovered. One question was as to whether so many were interested in his sculpture; another, as to who would help him to bear the risk and to find the cash, since three thousand pounds odd was more than he could conveniently raise alone. At this juncture, three Paris bankers stepped in and offered each







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to lend twenty thousand francs. The sculptor himself advanced a similar sum, and the enterprise went through. The three men who shared the risk were Messieurs Albert Kahn, Johanny Peytel and Louis Dorizon. The site was lent by the Paris Municipal Council, notwithstanding another outbreak of the hostile comments which have been periodically Rodin's portion. Of course, a number of eager helping friends were active in preparing the way for this result. In the Town Council itself the opposition was strong. Happily, Monsieur Escudier and two or three of the more influential members used their persuasion to good effect, and pressure was brought to bear upon indifferent or hostile opinion by artists and critics who were anxious to see the sculptor's worth at last judged by a fair standard, in the same way as that of former masters, such as Ingres, Courbet, etc. In due course, the Pavilion was opened. On the first day, which was also the 1st of June, the attendance was modest, some two or three hundred people, mostly artistes and *dilettanti*, a few foreigners among them, brought together by curiosity or by the prestige of the inauguration under the presidency of the Minister of Education, Monsieur Leygues. Gradually, however, the visitors became more numerous, and, towards the month of September, whatever doubt the sculptor or his friends might have entertained about the success of the exhibition, vanished.

For the help of those who wished to study this finest and most original collection perhaps ever shown by one man at the same time, an illustrated catalogue was prepared by the Société d'Édition Artistique, under the editorship of Arsène Alexandre, an art critic of known competency, whose own preface, with eulogiums by Carrière, Jean-Paul Laurens, Claude Monet and A. Besnard, made the book still more valuable. The second of these eulogiums has already been quoted in

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the chapter on the busts. The others, as coming from men of equal eminence in the world of art, are worth preserving. This is what Carrière said :—

“Rodin’s art issues from the earth and returns to it, like those giant blocks, rocks or dolmens which guard the desert, and in whose heroic proportions man has recognised something of himself. The transmission of thought by art, like the transmission of life, is the work of passion and love. Rodin, making himself the obedient servitor of passion, is enabled by it to discover the laws through which it is expressed. It is passion which quickens his sense of volume and proportion, and guides him in choosing the most telling reliefs. In the same way, earth exteriorises her usual forms, images and statues, which initiate us into the meaning of her inner life. These terrestrial forms have been Rodin’s real teachers. It is they who have freed him from the traditions of the schools ; by them he has grown cognisant of his own being, and of the creative instincts of men. To him has been revealed the analogy that trees and plants have with those fair maidens whose smooth legs, like slender columns, support the undulating body and swelling breasts, over which droops the head on its lissome neck, even as a bough is bent by the beautiful juicy fruit that hangs to it. . . . Rodin’s generalising mind has caused him to seek solitude. Born too late to have his share in building our cathedrals, he is nevertheless, by his intense sympathy, in union with the eternal forms of nature.”

Claude Monet spoke briefly, but to the point.

“You ask me to tell you in a few lines what I think of Rodin. You know already what I think, but to say it as I ought, I should need a talent I do not possess. Writing is not my trade. However, what I may set down is my great admiration for the man, unique in these times and great among the greatest. The exhibition of his collected works will be an event. It is sure to be a success,

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and will constitute a definite testimony to his artistic fame."

Albert Besnard wrote at somewhat greater length, but his contribution is all too short for the fine psychology it contains. He says:—

"In the course of the twenty years that have gone by, everything has been discussed that could be by men of letters and by critics. Their intervention, like the surgeon's scalpel, has done no more than lay bare admirable bodily organs, leaving the artist's soul veiled; for the divine fluid in which it bathes escapes analysis, even that of the artist himself. Did Prometheus know of what nature was the fire that he stole from Jupiter? His punishment taught him only that here below pain is the price of genius. Rodin also has had his vulture, just as all great artists who have sought their ideal in loftier regions. To-day, you ask an artist to develop the high reasons of art and skill which make this sculptor, unique in our time, the creator of forms and the evoker of ideas that have caused the present generation to thrill with admiration or with rage. I don't really know whether I have the right to try and satisfy you. What I may do is to set down a few of the thoughts suggested to me by the immense work before me. I imagine that Rodin's brain contains the total idea of the world with all its forms, its symbols and their innumerable complexities whence far-reaching syntheses are born. The passionate contemplation of nature has certainly brought him to feel that no force outside it is capable of suggesting its own symbol. Thence, that love of the *piece*, which furnishes Rodin with the expression itself of life, and permits him to fix the trace of the passions by making form reveal the idea, all ideas and the significations of humanity. Form, as Rodin understands it, becomes life. First, he makes men, and then he animates them; or better, they live as soon as they are



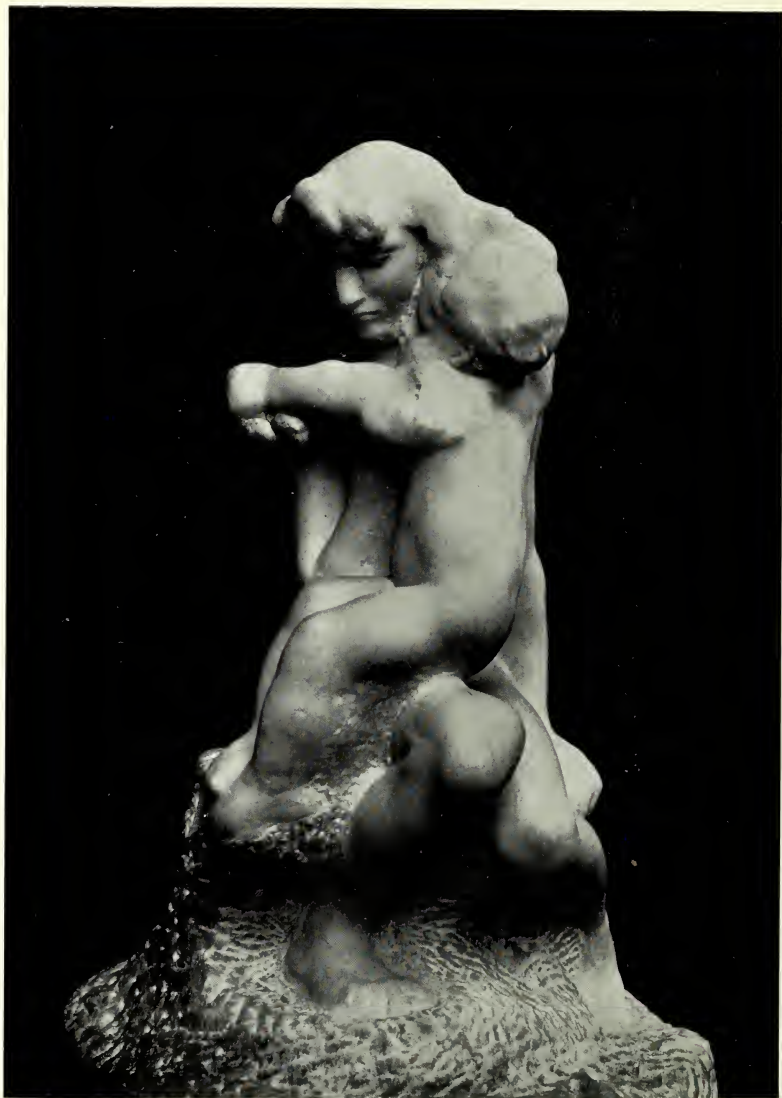
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perfect. This is contrary to the æsthetics of those artists who fancy they can produce something grand by selecting a pompous subject, without perceiving its human side, the absence of which condemns their works to oblivion. For the generations care only for those in which the human has the preponderating rôle. It is for this reason that Greek art is immortal, and will for ever be the guide of every art that will remain great. What would be our conception of the pagan world without the great sculptors of Greek antiquity? Poor Jupiter would be forgotten to-day without the divine Phidias. This leads me to say that Rodin is also a great historian; for he has recorded states of soul in matter by means of form, a thing which is still more important to history than facts or physiognomies, these latter being disfigured by reality. What, think you, would be said by future artists and men of letters, if, after all traces of our present world had disappeared, the statues of Hugo and Balzac were to be discovered? Well! they would say that these were vestiges of a great art period in which the admiration of the multitude for men of thought suggested grand works to sculptors of genius. They would divine in the Hugo statue the universal, inspired poet, the singer of nature and humanity, of passions and storms. They would see in the Balzac, so much criticised, so wantonly insulted, rising from his pedestal, as if about to spring into life; they would see the palpitating, intense and painful genius of a powerful psychologist; for to no other can belong such a carriage of the head, such orbits, in the depths of which roll eyes that are almost useless, humble servitors, as they are, of the all-seeing brain. At this height, the amplification of fiery ardour becomes serenity—the summit of art illuminated by genius and refreshed by the breath of pure thought."

As it has not been possible in the previous chapters to





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give anything like an adequate notion of the sculptor's entire production, a cursory notice of a number of pieces exhibited in 1900, and not already mentioned, will help to remedy this defect. Even the 1900 catalogue is not a complete list. To prepare such a one, and make it chronologically accurate, is a desideratum; but long investigations would be required for it.

Among the single statues were very many nude figures of women, each pose a fresh study, and with emanating expressions ranging from the simple to the wondrously complex. One was combing her hair; another in a bath stooping and rubbing the back of her neck, while her hair fell over her head in front; a third was recumbent on her side; a fourth, fashioned in the antique style and standing; here was a torso leaning backwards, there a woman stopping her ears; others lying prone or prostrate or squatting. In them the attitudes and the modelling were the chief things to observe, though in all was the vibration and thrilling of the body, besides the outline. Elsewhere, the emotions were more clearly defined. On the corner of a huge folio placed flatwise, a sylph-like form lay on her back, and with wanton joy held her feet raised in the air, clasping them with her hands. Another sat frog-like, with her knees drawn close to her chin, and gazed with melancholy air before her. A third, of still more dejected look than the preceding, cowered with one leg bent over the other knee, and grasping the extended foot. A fourth knelt, subjugated by the mastery of love. The female busts to which no name was attached were not less striking than those which had. One showed a face weeping bitterly, a second a type that might be called ugly, with high cheek bones and thick lips, but redeemed by the dreamy, wide open eyes. The most remarkable was a woman's head surmounting a column of marble, which was adorned with small low relief figures. Symbolic it suggested the poet's outlook on life.

# The Life of Rodin

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The purely female groups were less numerous. Here, however, one saw a fountain embellished with three sirens, two playing together, and a third poising on the crest of the water, with crossed legs and holding her feet with her opposite hands. In the ocean waves three other sirens, enlaced together, sang like Wagner's daughters of the Rhine. Standing, with their heads near and the lower body draped, were three beautifully and chastely-chiselled forms representing the three Virtues. Quite different were the "Lost Women," a group of two—one lying on the ground tired out with weeping, the other lamenting and trying to raise her with outstretched arms. Different, too, the three female forms, counterparts of the Virtues, dancing in a ring with careless grace.

With the exception of the celebrated great masterpieces, single male figures were rare. One most strangely attractive was an allegory of man being reabsorbed by nature. The man's body was doubled up and had begun to sink into the ground among moss and flowers, which partially covered him, and from which his arm emerged. Worthy of ranking with the greatest, was a kneeling figure with all the upper part of the body and the arms straining towards heaven in an attitude of urgent entreaty. It was a statue in which the planes had been simplified to the utmost, and the lines executed with a beauty that haunted the memory. Its title, the "Prodigal Son," was hardly the best conceivable. The entreaty of face and gesture were something more passionate—a prayer that would rend heaven.

The bulk of the subjects were those that mingled the sexes; and in them the gamut of emotion was touched throughout its compass. The dalliance of a "Dryad with a Fawn," was the contrast of coy feminine charms with the elementary physical force of the male; the hairy, hoofed creature half-pleased, half-irritated at the teasing, would fain have seized the dryad, but felt her power and



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doubted of his own. In the "Ravishment," there was the male's force broken loose; a man held a woman high in the air with the exultation of conquest; cramped and crushed, the victim, with lack-lustre face, manifested a mute animal suffering. A detached group from the "Hell Gate" presented a man and a woman carried through the air, back to back, in a pose boldly original; it was the Flight of love. Of another kind was the "Sculptor and his Muse"; the artist seated with his elbow on one knee and his hand supporting his head, while the muse that had approached him hovered on the breeze. Allied to it, was another group of two, an angel fallen from heaven and a form bending over him to console. The hostility of the sexes was represented by a woman and a satyr, the former wrathfully defending herself, and the latter endeavouring to seize and detain her. Woman as the tempter and man as the tempted, had also their portrayal. In one small group, the woman high above the man embraced him as a helpless prey; in another, the man resisted but weakly, while the woman wound herself around him; in another, it was a siren bearing a youth into the waters. Venus and Adonis, Daphnis and Lycenion showed lovers' love in sorrow and in joy.

Affection of another and calmer sort, with all the pure joy it could comprise, was figured in an alto-relievo group of two, a mother stooping and holding out her arms to her baby, with a grotto background to shroud the scene. A second reading of the same subject was a baby brother sitting on the knees of a grown-up sister. In both, the motherly sentiment was so wrought into the sculpture that it seemed warm with tenderness.

Other subjects from mythology embodied passions less germane to love; for example, a "Vulcan and Pandora" and a "Perseus and Medusa." This latter was a splendidly imaginative piece of statuary. The hero stood

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with the monster's head that he had just cut off and brandished it aloft with lightsome feet. The headless trunk of Medusa lay beneath him, one hand clutching at her conqueror's toe.

Of the remaining groups of two, some touched and embodied the mystery of mind and individuality; for instance, the "Man and his Thought," a male figure in large size facing an idealised and smaller self—the only real communion that is permanent. Or again, it was the conflict of the religious aspiration with the flesh; in the "Temptation of St Antony," the saint was prostrate on the ground, striving to hide himself with his serge mantle from the sight of a fair woman that was bending over him.

Unique and apart was the "Hand of God," a huge hand modelled with all the science of an anatomist, physiologist, and chiromancer combined, and all the art the sculptor can show in fashioning the whole body. In the palm were a miniature Adam and Eve resting on a portion of the clay that had served to make them, the rôle and character of each sex being indicated—the woman embracing, the man protecting.

Among the mixed groups of three or more figures, the subjects were equally various. One represented a Triton carrying off a siren into the sea, while two other sirens stood on a rock, excited by the spectacle. A second was a dying poet extended on the ground and raising his head in a last effort; three muses bent over him with differing expressions of mourning, of hope, and of doubt; exquisite in sentiment and workmanship, this piece of sculpture attracted every eye. Not less affecting was Niobe with eyes raised to heaven and lamenting her dead children scattered around her.

For fancy to call up the picture and spectacle composed by so many and diverse forms, in which the great and well-known masterpieces stood out, imposing and seemly,



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it requires more than description in detail. What is wanted is the same wonder that was felt by eye-witnesses of the reality; and a good expression of this, together with its explanation, was the discourse pronounced within the walls of the Pavilion on the last day of July, two months after the Rodin exhibition had been opened. It was Monsieur Camille Mauclair who was chosen by the International School of the Exhibition as spokesman. His lecture, a model of clear exposition, related the genesis and evolution of the master's style, dwelt on the increasing attention paid to rendering the statue as largely visible as possible in the open air, and consequently to the related light and shadow, called by artists the value. Defending Rodin from the charge of being a literary theorist, he confessed him to be a symbolist, who did not distinguish matter from the ideas it engendered. Seeking, however, to understand every state of the soul, the symbolist came to be able to translate all and every one, by their effects on the body, which accounted for the erotism of some of his subjects.

"The sculptor," he said, turning to Rodin's method, "began to work with great precaution on parts already executed in faithful proportion with the model, adding clay to a relief, hollowing out a cavity more, exaggerating here and there the relation of two planes, insisting on the characteristic curve of a bone or a muscle; then he grew bolder, felt himself more satisfied. The half-tints became softer, more downy; the light glided more easily over the surfaces; the large silhouette was firmer, and, at the same time, less hard, as it was seen against the background of the studio. The atmosphere, caressing its amplifications, vibrated around them. The research of large planes furnished a play of light and shade much richer and more vivid; all the essential outlines were put in their right place; but they contributed better to the whole. Around



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the plaster there was no void ; the light impinged strongly on the round boss, but also penetrated gently into the recesses and connected them with the envioning space. The forms, enlarged and harmonised, contained the essential details of the personage, yet without attracting the eye on one or another point to the detriment of the whole. Sculpture, at last, gained the same mysterious diffusion of light which is the charm of painting, and a perspective was obtained by the magic of amplification. A work of Monsieur Rodin seen in a gallery was recognised first by a sort of luminosity surrounding it, and only afterwards by its exceptional silhouette. It would almost appear to be surrounded by a nebulous halo, like the concentric waves photographers were able to perceive round the fingers of a medium. Between the statue and the ambient atmosphere there existed a union of vibrations, which painters obtained in a picture by the chromatic gradation of tones."

"Rodin's potent quality was less imagination than the instructive sense of the occult volition in matter, the sense of atomic life."

This, and a good deal besides, Monsieur Mauclair spoke, that gave to his listeners on the July day, beneath the Pavillion's cover, and surrounded by illustrations of the lecturer's language, a reason of the wonder which was in them. Those of the sculptor's friends who had worked hard to obtain the authorisation for the Pavillion to be erected—and hard work had been necessary—were more than rewarded by the enjoyment of the scene.

As chorus to this special manifestation came the publication in the Exhibition year of a special number of the Art Journal: *La Plume*; a symphony of no fewer than twenty-one writers giving their voice in various tones and notes, but forming an impressive tribute. Marx, Mirbeau, Geffroy, Mauclair were among the number, and two English writers on Rodin's art, Arthur Symons and Frank

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Harris, had the honours of translation. In Mirbeau's short but pithy preface there were very sensible hints that dithyrambic praise might miss the mark. "If one were to believe some of the sculptor's admirers, he was a mystic philosopher, a magician, an astrologer, everything except a downright good sculptor, perfect in his kind. On the contrary, the beauty that Rodin expressed was shown solely by form, and by his intimate comprehension of the immense yet simple harmony enclosing in the same language of forms, the human body, the clouds of the sky, the tree, the mountain, the stone and the flower. This was why the sculptor astonished and moved us. It would seem that nature, as being better loved by him, took pleasure in making him the depositary of even her best kept secrets. His genius was not only to have bestowed on us immortal masterpieces; it was to have done his work as a sculptor, to have rediscovered an admirable art which was in danger of being entirely forgotten. The really affecting quality of Rodin's figures, the quality by which, over and above, but perhaps still on account of their sculptural beauty, they touched us so profoundly, was that we recognised ourselves in them, and that, as Stephane Mallarmé said, they were our suffering companions."

This symphony, of which Monsieur Octave Mirbeau wrote the prelude, had followed a symposium also organised by the *Plume*, or rather by its owner and editor, Monsieur Karl Boès, than whom Rodin has no sincerer disciple. The feast was held on the 11th of June at the Café Voltaire, and was a sort of house-warming for the Pavilion. More than a hundred and twenty artists and men of letters were present, representing the sculptor's own generation of artistic talent with Felix Régamey,<sup>1</sup> and the succeeding one which he had helped to form, with Emile Bourdelle; representing also different nation-

<sup>1</sup> The brother of Guillaume Régamey.

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alities, the English, naturally, with the others. Although commemorative of past accomplished labour, the character of this manifestation was a look-out into the future; It was to young artists that the master addressed himself in his speech, and it was in the name of young artists that Karl Boès proposed his toast. The latter was a fine utterance, composed only of two periods, with a dozen words of introduction and another dozen to close. "Brother in glory," he said, "of our great Puvis de Chavannes down the centuries to come, you are, like him, of those who prevent tired nations from despairing of themselves, and who awake in chilled hearts as it were a blood of miraculous resurrection—admiration; the admiration of masterpieces, therefore admiration of what life can be made. Your glorious pieces of sculpture have in sooth recalled to our minds, too long in dalliance with the learned tricks of jugglers, the solemn truth: Life is a block of precious matter, but has its final worth only through the chisel that carves it; it is a shapeless indifferent block, yes, but a block from which under the ideal's fashioning breath, beauty can arise, always."

As Rodin's own exhibition in 1900 was in no wise dictated by a proud wish to separate himself from his brother artists, he availed himself of the common opportunity to share in the Centennial and Decennial collections of painting and sculpture that formed part of the Great Universal Exhibition. He had once before taken part in a Centennial display of sculpture in the previous exhibition of 1889; but, as the regulations admitted only works that were at least ten years old, his "Man with the Broken Nose" was the sole specimen that then represented him. In the Centennial collection of 1900, there were eight of his pieces of statuary numbered from 1790 to 1797. They comprised the "Age d'Airain," the "Head of St John the Baptist," these two in bronze, the "Creation of Man," in plaster, the busts of Jean Paul Laurens and



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of Dalou in bronze, the bust of Victor Hugo in plaster, as also of Mrs Russell, and one of the "Bourgeois de Calais" in plaster. In the Decennial collection he was represented by one of his masterpieces, the "Baiser."

Foreign criticism of the Pavilion and all its works was a very fair counterpart of the French. In Paris detractors had their say, some with intelligence, some with none. So abroad. An amusing specimen of what might be called—borrowing Lord Beaconsfield's famous phrase—"the hair-brained chatter of irresponsible frivolity," appeared in a San Francisco newspaper from a lady writer. "Rodin," she said, "is the greatest man of his day and generation, and he is the most degraded example of the decadence of French art. He is animated by the most lofty spiritual motives, and his work is simply 'cochonnerie,'<sup>1</sup> no more, no less. He has founded a school, and he is dragging sculpture from its pedestal and trampling it in the mud." After this preface, we are not at all disturbed by the lady's description of the Balzac: "This monstrous thing, ogre, devil, and deformity in one." Different from this seven-league-boot, sky-scraping criticism, more measured and logical, but hardly less hostile was the pronouncement of Mr Claude Phillips in the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>2</sup> After concessions to the master's realistic power, he summed up his life-work as a "magnificent failure," deemed the Bourgeois de Calais, as a whole, grotesque, and the Balzac as an insult to the great public. Unfortunately, Mr Phillips as well as the lady—whom it is better to leave anonymous—offered no arguments in support of their strong statements. The former, indeed, spoke of Rodin's having been spoiled by foolish flattery, but omitted to say who were the flatterers. On the other hand, writers who spoke in praise of the Pavilion collection, had arguments, and very solid ones,

<sup>1</sup> "Piggishness," meaning something very low.

<sup>2</sup> 8th September 1900.

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to advance for the faith that was in them. Mr D. S. MacColl's articles in the *Saturday Review*,<sup>1</sup> published a few days after that of the *Telegraph*, were as full of close reasoning observation as a good joint of meat is full of gravy. To select only one example. Speaking of the "Creation of Man," he said: "It will bear long examination from one point after another, to note how this shape, so highly endowed with expressive life, plays also a rhythmical music among its parts, and that this is one secret of its life. It might seem impossible that a head, a torso, two arms, two legs, elements so few should recombine in so many patterns, all simple, all subtle and surprising, all enforcing that one slow dragging upward gesture of the awakening man. From in front, the shape is almost rectangular, the head droops so flat upon the shoulder, with its profile in the slightest relief upon the plane of the chest, while the other arms hang in heavy parallel. From other points of view the forms, so simply enclosed in this, set up new correspondences, and you would think the whole had been designed for each new angle of vision."

That and the rest of Mr MacColl's articles are better than assertions of Rodin's life being a "magnificent failure," whatever the epithet may mean. Dipping into the mass of literature good, bad, and indifferent, which was called forth by the Alma Exhibition, it is clear that its aims were much misunderstood by the sculptor's enemies, and not altogether understood by his friends. Both sides too much ignored that the practical question was the one legitimately uppermost in Rodin's mind, and that a great artist, as well as any other man, has a right to be prudent, to defend himself when attacked, to be tenacious in the struggle, to obtain justice for his artistic performance. The Pavilion was, in particular, a reply to the refusal of the Balzac, and, in general, to the ostracism

<sup>1</sup> The last, on September 29, 1900.

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of the academicians from which he had so much suffered. It was the best reply that could be given ; yet how far it was from the master's thought to make it an occasion of vain glory or boasting defiance is proved by the fact—revealed by a friend—that alone the insisting request of the bankers who were guaranteeing the bigger share of the initial expenses, induced him to consent to the re-appearance of the Balzac in public at that time. He would have much preferred appealing to his fellow-countrymen and the world at large, without seeking to snatch a victory for his most contested statue through the recognised qualities of his other sculpture. If the effort had a success beyond its immediate object, like Longfellow's arrow shot into the air, and carried with it echoes and perfumes of the higher regions of poesy, it was no more than the reward which now and again falls to the lot of the toiler who knows how to work and wait.

The Pavilion did not long survive the close of the exhibition. It was a grief to the master to pull it down, although it was to rise again at Meudon. He would have been glad to go there from his studio on the other side of the river, and still enjoy for himself the right of his assembled family—children he had begotten—whom he loved with much of the affection peculiar to the parent. "I wanted to keep it open two or three months longer," he said, confessing himself to a visitor, "if only to study the collection awhile where I have plenty of space to see it well. But there are obstacles which prevent—the site, which is wanted. So all the things must go, some back to my studio, some to different museums and private owners who have lent them to me. It is a pity." This note of regret was the best adieu to an undertaking, in which the commercial had been present, but only as a necessity, and which had contained and shown so great a portion of the sculptor's self.

## CHAPTER XVI

### RELATIONS WITH ENGLAND

RODIN, it will be remembered, had started for England in 1871, but, as he went through Belgium, it took him ten years to get to London. The delay in arriving was no bad thing for him, since, on paying his visit to Legros in 1881, he found that his reputation had preceded him. It is true the number of those who then understood his "Age d'Airain" and "St John" was not large, but the interest created was no eight days' wonder, and was destined to grow.

His first works exhibited in the Egyptian Hall<sup>1</sup> had no particular notice taken of them. Besnard, Roll, Gervex, and one or two other artists also exhibited; and a party, with Rodin among them, came over on the occasion of this experiment, and put up at the Charing Cross Hotel. The sculptor believes that one of the pieces of sculpture he sent was subsequently offered for sale at Christie's rooms, where some amateurs thought it was a Donatello, and were disposed to bid high for it; but, as the name was discovered, their zeal cooled.

There was one man who more than any other at this time encouraged the French master to appeal to the English public. It was W. E. Henley. The acquaintance was made through their common friend Legros; and, from 1881 until his death in 1903, the editor of the

<sup>1</sup> The sculptor is under the impression that no work of his was exhibited in England previously; but, as he is unable to give the date, and it is certain that the "Man with the Broken Nose" was shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1881, there is some reason to doubt this statement.

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*Magazine of Art* was in frequent and affectionate correspondence with Rodin. He was taken away just too soon, and before the triumph for which he had prepared the road. One of his last preoccupations was to arrange for the sculptor to do the bust of Mr Wyndham, at the time, Secretary for Ireland. It would have been a joy for Henley to see this fresh example of the power he so admired. His enthusiasm was early-born. Writing to Rodin from Chiswick in November 1881, and alluding to the "Man with the Broken Nose," of which he possessed a copy, he says :—

"The bust is a perpetual reminder of you. It remains eternally beautiful, with a beauty of the 'great art.' You have not lacked disappointments, my friend; on the contrary, I know that you have struggled hard, suffered much, and toiled hard. And yet how happy you must be! You work for the centuries to come; you know what you are doing; you do it well. Yes, how happy you must be!"

In preceding chapters, mention has been made both of the sculptor's portrait painted by Legros<sup>1</sup> in 1882, and of Legros' bust executed by his friend a little later. There was also another portrait of the sculptor—an engraving done by Legros in 1881. To this a reference was made by the latter in an epistle dated the 23rd of November of that year; he has a word about the bust too :—

"I shall shortly have to ask a service from you with regard to some medallions which I have finished and will send you in a few days, when the painter has delivered me the proof engravings of your portrait. . . . I am anticipating the pleasure of having my bust from you, and, when I come to Paris, I will give you a good many sittings."

Of course, Henley's endeavours to educate his readers and public was no A B C task. Prejudice was not

<sup>1</sup> It was done in Cazin's studio in Paris.



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unknown on the London side any more than on the Paris side of the Channel. His aim, however, was not to provoke controversy; he wished rather a study and a fair discussion of Rodin's most characteristic productions; and by the tone of his articles, as by the advice given to the sculptor about what to exhibit, he secured his object. One unfortunate incident happened in 1886, when a piece sent by Rodin to the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy was refused. But it appears that the rejection was due to a misunderstanding, so that the affair has no great importance. Writing to the sculptor about it on the 4th of May, Monsieur Lantéri said:—

“You will no doubt receive by the same post a letter from Mr Boehm, to whom I spoke of the refusal of your group at the Academy. He knew nothing of the matter, and was exceedingly vexed; and begs me to tell you that he was not on the Committee this year, nor can he imagine who is responsible for the blunder. . . . In artistic circles here everybody is shocked, knowing and admiring your talent as they do. . . . Mr Boehm will give you further details, as he intends to make inquiries; but especially he wishes you to know that he has had nothing to do with the judging this year, and is most grieved at what has occurred.”

Before 1886, Rodin had returned to England on more than one occasion since his first journey across the Channel, had extended his acquaintance with London artists and men of letters, and come to know Henley better. In the year 1883, there was some correspondence between the two friends with regard to the Victor Hugo bust. As showing his increasing admiration for the sculptor, one letter written by Henley in October is nearly all of it relevant. He says:—

“As for the bust, we have time. The day for sending is the 18th of next month. Between now and then, I

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will do all that is necessary, and you shall shortly know how to act. Now, for the matter between us. I really think, my dear friend, I ought not to accept the reduction you offer. First, you owe me nothing at all. What I have done, and shall do in the future, has been and will be done because you are a great artist, and because it is my duty as a critic to praise a thing which is fine. Moreover, I must confess to you that I don't care much for the great poet, he makes me swear too much and laugh too much. You have achieved a masterpiece with his head, a masterpiece for which I have a great and sincere admiration, as you will see in the article I am going to write on the two busts. But masterpiece as it is, I am stupidly unable to disassociate the model and the bust, the poet and the sculptor, the false art from the true. If only it were Berlioz, Shakespeare, Millet, or Rodin! But Hugo! . . . I don't know whether I make myself understood. No doubt you will say I am silly, and you will be right. One of these days, if you really insist on seeing in me only a relentless creditor, you might make a sketch of my big, empty head, and there will be an end of the matter. . . . Your two busts will appear in the issue of the 25th of December."

Another acquaintanceship Rodin made through Legros was with Mr G. Natorp,<sup>1</sup> who, born in 1836 at Hamburg, went to America in 1854, where he naturalised himself, and after remaining in business there and in England until 1875, retired, in order to devote himself to art. Commencing his studies at the Slade School in 1879, he was introduced to the French sculptor a couple of years later. His own account of their relations is pleasant reading. He says: "In 1881, intending to spend the

<sup>1</sup> Examples of Mr Natorp's sculpture are—Medallion of Robert Browning, 1888 (this is in Rodin's possession); Biblis Statuette, 1892; Atalanta, 1896; Bust of Miss Adelaide Burton, 1897; Diana, 1898.

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winter in Italy, with a view to a little study of sculpture (I had only drawn and painted so far), Legros suggested my studying under Rodin for four or six weeks ; and so I became Rodin's pupil in November. His teaching was absolutely a revelation to me. I do not believe he has his equal in the ability to give to his inferiors the benefit of his vast insight into the great principles of all art by his wonderful power of analysis, and by the warmth of his admiration for all that is great in art and in nature. While I was at the Boulevard Montparnasse, he came to see me twice a week from November 1881 to May 1882 ; and not the least admirable lessons were those when we left the studio after dark, and when, talking most delightfully about his art, he would take me to a café, call for pen, ink and paper, and illustrate his views on composition, etc., by his masterly drawings. Needless to say, I have them with me. I was his first pupil ; but several more, R. Barrett Browning, F. Baden Powell, etc., were attracted by him, and he joined me and my chums in our monthly dinners. This fact brought many other artists to them, Sargent, de Nittis, Besnard, Edelfelt, Collin, Gervex, etc., and we had the most delightful gatherings.

" In the winter 1881-2, Professor Legros came to Paris on a visit to me, and sat to Rodin for his bust in my studio. I returned to Paris in October 1882 and stayed until June 1883, Rodin coming to see me twice a month. I was then doing a two-thirds life statuette of Hercules, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1884, and at the Salon. When I left, Rodin said : ' Now, I have given you a compass, by means of which, with nature for a professor, you can steer by yourself.' What an admirable master ! Rodin came to London with me in June 1883, and stayed a week or two in my former house in Palace Gardens Terrace. He was charmed with our galleries, and with everything he saw or heard here ;

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for I must not omit to say he is very fond of listening to good music. Rodin paid me another visit (in this house) in 1886 or 1887. After that, his visits to London were only short ones, but we always saw something of each other, and he does not forget his old pupil. I may add that, during the 1887 visit, I gave a dinner in honour of Rodin, at which most of the prominent sculptors and painters were present."

The R. Barrett Browning spoken of by Mr Natorp is, of course, the son of the poet, whom the sculptor also knew, and some of whose verses he has read in translations. In an extant letter from the son, dated 1882, there is an allusion to the bust of the "Man with the Broken Nose," a copy of which had been despatched to the elder Browning. Once, at least, in Paris, the author of the "Ring and the Book" met his son's professor. Monsieur Thurat even related that he entertained Rodin at a dinner in a restaurant on the Place de Rennes; but the sculptor has forgotten the circumstance. A short missive from the poet still exists. It is dated the 4th of January 1883, and has the address 19 Warwick Crescent, W. The contents are as follows:—

"MY DEAR MONSIEUR RODIN,—Nothing could be more flattering than your kind note of yesterday, the expressions of which I reciprocate, begging you to believe that it is for me, as for my son, an inestimable advantage that a sculptor of your rank should allow the latter to profit by the advice and friendship which he appreciates as they really deserve.—Believe me, dear Monsieur Rodin, very sincerely yours,  
ROBERT BROWNING."

The other English student, Baden-Powell, is the brother of the celebrated general. His presence at one of the recent London banquets implied that the memory of the student days is still green.

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As Mr Natorp testifies, Rodin genuinely enjoys being in London. From the very first, he felt the mysterious attraction of the city's immense hum of life and its colouring, which his friend Claude Monet has interpreted in his series of Thames and Westminster pictures. "Nothing," he says, "can be more beautiful than the rich, dark, and ruddy tones of the London buildings, in the grey and golden haze of the afternoon." In his earlier visits he made excursions to Windsor, where he saw some Holbein drawings that he speaks of with all an artist's love; and to Oxford, whose blending of old and new in their framework of lovely scenery made a deep impression on him. One of his experiences in the University town was a dinner at Christ's College, where he sat at the Fellows' table. The return journey was effected by short stages, allowing him to see something of Reading and the banks of the Thames.

His intimacy with Henley gradually assumed a more familiar character. The latter's epistles to him were mostly short, confidential in tone, with a word on professional matters as an excuse for writing. For instance, in one dated November 1884, he says:—

"Tell me if you received my last letter, and why you have not replied to me; I mean the one in which I announced to you the fine ending to our negotiations with the Portfolio. Dramas don't pay now. People want something besides dramatic composition; they want sensation, juggling, conjuring. It's annoying, isn't it? You are familiar with the like experience, and we shall have your sympathy. How happy you must be! To care so little about money, and to, at last, have the opportunity of being recognised as an artist! That's real life! Good-bye! To think of you is the finest lesson I know."

Although Legros was the primary agent in introducing Robert Louis Stevenson to Rodin, Henley had much to







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do with their further relations. A good French scholar, the novelist charmed the sculptor by his fine understanding of the beautiful. His brother also, the artist, was much appreciated. Begun in the last years of their life, Rodin's intercourse with the Stevensons was too short for an extensive correspondence; but there are two extant letters from the novelist's pen which may be appropriately given here. They were apparently written in the same year, the one to the *Times*, about the sculptor, the other to Rodin himself. This latter is undated, and the address is Bournemouth.

"My dear Friend," he says—"I should have to count the arrears of letters I owe you by tens; my excuse is that, though better, I am still only so-so. The journey to Bournemouth had to be made through fear of the murderous fogs. It was like the flight into Egypt, and I was very tired before it was over. Now I feel stronger and can send you a few lines.

"The 'Printemps'<sup>1</sup> duly arrived, but with a broken arm; so we left it, as we fled, in the care of a statue-doctor. I am expecting every day to get it, and my cottage will soon be resplendent with it. I much regret about the dedication; perhaps it won't be too late to add it, when you come to see us; at least I hope so. The statue is for everybody; the dedication is for me. The statue is a present, too beautiful a one even; it is the friend's word which gives it me for good. I am so stupid that I have got mixed up and don't know where I am; but you will understand me, I think.

"I cannot even express myself in English. How can you expect me to do so in French? More fortunate than we are, the Nemesis of the arts does not visit me under the form of disenchantment. She saps my intelligence and leaves me agape without capacity, but without regret;

<sup>1</sup> A small plaster group of the "Eternal Spring." See chapter on the "Magnum Opus."

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without hope, it is true, but also, thank God, without despair. A mild astonishment has taken possession of me ; I cannot accustom myself to being so block-headed, but I am resigned. Even if it should last, it would not be disagreeable ; but, as I should certainly die of hunger, it would be at least regrettable for me and my family.

"I wish I had the power to write to you ; but it is not I who hold the pen. It is the other, the animal, who doesn't know French, who doesn't love my friends as I love them, who doesn't appreciate the things of art as I appreciate them, whom I disavow, but whom I always dominate sufficiently to make him take pen in hand and write twaddle. This animal, my dear Rodin, you don't love ; you must never know him. Your friend who is asleep at present, like a bear, in the depths of my being, will shortly awake. Then, he shall write to you with his own hand. Wait for him. The other doesn't count. He is a sorry and unfaithful secretary, with a cold heart and a wooden head.

"He who is sleeping, my dear friend, is ever yours. He who writes is commissioned to inform you of the fact, and to sign for the Firm.

"ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON and TRIPLE BRUTE.  
(per T. B.)."

The document published in the *Times* is dated September the 6th 1886, and bears the address, Skerry-moore, Bournemouth. It is a reply to an attack on Rodin. Under the light of what has since happened, it reads like a prophecy. He begins :—

"SIR,—Mr Armitage, R.A., repeating (by his own confession), in ignorance, that which he has gathered from the lips of the indiscriminating, comes before your readers with a strange account of Monsieur Rodin. That gentleman, I read, is called the *Zola of Sculpture* ; and his work

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*is too realistic and coarse even for the strong stomach of the French public.* I will not deny that he may have been called the Zola of sculpture, but I should like to know by whom. The point of such a phrase lies in the authority, and a byword is no argument; or which of the two popular views are we to accept of Mr Gladstone, and which of the Academy?

“Mr Zola is a man of a personal and fanciful talent, approaching genius, but of diseased ideals; a lover of the ignoble; dwelling complacently in foulness; and, to my sense, touched with erotic madness. These defects mar his work so intimately that I have nothing further from my mind than to defend it. I do not think it can often have a good influence; I am inclined to fear it will always have a bad. And on this I would say one word, in passing, to Mr Armitage—that national comparisons are seldom wise; and he will find (if he look around him) the dainty stomachs of the English supporting Monsieur Zola with a fortitude hardly to be distinguished from gratification, and that, in a translation from which the redeeming merits of the original have fled.

“To Monsieur Rodin the first words of the above description may be applied, and the first words only. He, too, is a man of a personal and fanciful talent, and there all comparison is at an end. Monsieur Rodin’s work is real in the sense that it is studied from the life and itself lives; but it has not a trace of realism in the evil, and that is in the privative sense. Monsieur Zola presents us with a picture to no detail of which can we take grounded exception. It is only on the whole that it is false. We find therein nothing lovable or worthy; no trace of the pious gladnesses, innocent loves, ennobling friendships, and not infrequent heroisms by which we live surrounded; nothing of the high mind and the pure aims in which we find our consolation. Hence we call his work realistic in the evil sense, meaning that it is dead to the ideal and



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speaks only to the senses. Monsieur Rodin's work is the clean contrary of this. His is no triumph of workmanship lending an interest to what is base, but to an increasing degree, as he proceeds in life, the noble expression of noble sentiment and thought. I was one of a party of artists that visited his studio the other day ; and, after having seen his later work, the 'Dante,'<sup>1</sup> the 'Paolo and Francesca,' the 'Printemps qui passe,' we came forth again into the streets of Paris, silenced, gratified, humbled in the thought of our own efforts, yet with a fine sense that the age was not utterly decadent, and that there were yet worthy possibilities in art. But, remark, it was not the sculptor we admired ; nor was it his skill, admirable and unusual as that is, that we talked of as we went homeward. These questions of material talent had fallen below our thoughts ; and the solemn face of the 'Dante'<sup>1</sup> over the great door still spoke to our imagination.

"The public are weary of statues that say nothing. Well, here is a man coming forward, whose statues live and speak, and speak things worth uttering. Give him time, spare him nicknames and the cant of cliques, and I venture to predict this man will take a place in the public heart.—I am, etc., ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON."

Henley's letter, referring to his own and Stevenson's busts, has already been quoted. Many others were exchanged between him and the sculptor in the following years ; but private circumstances prevented the correspondents from saying much to each other that could be aptly reproduced here. Rodin was in the thick of his professional activity, and ceased his visits to England from sheer lack of leisure. On the other side, Henley's occupations also became more absorbing, and his always precarious health more troublesome. Then occurred his terrible loss—the death of his only child and daughter,

<sup>1</sup> A first sketch of the "Penseur." See chapter on the "Magnum Opus."

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the "Golden Child" as he styled her. Some time after, towards the end of the 'nineties his tone recovered a little of its old cheerfulness, but never entirely. One letter written in October 1898, which weaves his own name with Rodin's in touching fashion, forms a sort of epilogue :—

"Dear and great friend" (he calls him),— . . . "I have done a good deal since you made me live in bronze. I am almost a somebody. People speak of me, my dear Rodin, a little, a very little, as they speak of you ; I mean, as of an artist who has always done as he thought fit, without ever caring for other people's money or praises. . . . I believe my verses won't all perish. And yet, what is the use of speaking about it ? I am dead ; my wife, too, is dead. We lost all in losing that marvel of life and wit—our daughter. You would have cared for her, too. She had everything, everything. And now we have finished with life.

"As for you, my dear Rodin, you are still for me the only one of the moderns since Corot. Just now, that admirable bronze of yours is being exhibited at the Society of Portrait-painters ; and the public are beginning to speak of it as it deserves. Here and there, friends are asking me for proofs of it. Send me the address of your caster.

"I love you and admire you still, as in the fine times gone by. And that is all I can say, my dear Rodin, all I can say.—Your devoted friend, W. E. HENLEY."

Although England saw very little of the sculptor himself during the 'nineties, his productions continued to attract an attention which kept him well in public view. Besides the newspaper notices of his sculpture at the New Salon, special articles were written on some of his greater works. The *Magazine of Art*, for instance,

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published illustrations and criticisms of the Bastien Lepage statue, the Puvis de Chacannes bust, and the "Bourgeois de Calais" monument in 1893 and 1895. The "Balzac" and the "Hell Gate" were dealt with in 1898. During this last year, there was some talk of entrusting the master with Mr Gladstone's statue, but, whether on account of the strained political relations between the two countries at the moment, or from a private reason, the commission was not given. At this date also, a young artist, Mr W. Rothenstein, was endeavouring to form an establishment for the exposition and sale of works by masters old and new, and to place the French sculptor's smaller productions on his list. In 1900 the Carfax Gallery in London showed a number of the master's drawings, both of the older and newer style, and with them two or three little statuettes in bronze, one being a reduction of the "Balzac" head. Another detail that cannot be passed over is the willingness that he still manifested to advise and teach young English sculptors. Miss Otille Maclaren, whose talent the master praises, came to him at the close of the century, and continued to benefit by his counsels for two or three years.

When in 1902, after a long absence, Rodin returned once more to England, there were new faces to welcome him among the old; and he came to be received as a public guest. The occasion was an auspicious one. A copy of the famous "St John" had been purchased by public subscription and presented to the South Kensington Museum. In this case, the initiative had been largely due to the younger generation of the sculptor's admirers, notably to Mr John Tweed, Mr Rothenstein, Mr D. S. MacColl, and Mr Arthur Symonds. Had there been any risk of failure in the subscription, Mr Ernest Beckett, M.P., was ready to provide the money himself. But the movement was well taken up; the amount required was easily found; so Mr Beckett made known



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his intention of buying the "Penseur," and offering it as a second gift to the nation. To celebrate the success of their scheme, the above-mentioned friends of Rodin and Monsieur Lanteri, Dalou's successor at South Kensington, organised a banquet and invited the master to be present. So he crossed the Channel in May, twenty-one years after his first journey to England, which the "St John" had also in a way caused, and there was an enthusiastic gathering at the Café Royal, Mr Wyndham, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, being in the chair. At the close of the banquet, there was a spontaneous manifestation which surprised and delighted the guest of the evening. A certain number of art students connected with the South Kensington and Slade Schools, who had come to cheer him, unharnessed the horses of the carriage which was waiting to take him back to Mr Tweed's house, where he was staying, and themselves drew it for some distance through the streets. Thereupon Sir Alma Tadema, who was with Rodin, and enjoyed this unrehearsed part of the entertainment, insisted on treating the students, who were over a hundred in number, to supper at a convenient restaurant. Rodin, Henley, Sargent, and others sat down too, and made a second meal, but touched the viands more lightly.

There was a sequel to this impromptu meeting between the French master and the English students. The latter induced Rodin to promise a visit for their especial benefit, which he paid in the ensuing May. On this occasion, the students themselves prepared the banquet, and made Mr Alfred Gilbert, R.A., their chairman. In the principal speeches, high praise was given to Rodin, and graceful acknowledgment was added of the services rendered to England by French art. The sculptor was much affected by the genuine language of these young men who had assembled to do him honour, and counts the evening among his most precious souvenirs.

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The echoes of the preceding feast had hardly died away when Rodin was informed of an important resolution which had just been passed by the International Society of Sculptors, Painters, and 'Gravers. Whistler, the president, was dead, and the committee wisely thought that the sculptor of the "St John" and the "Penseur" would be a worthy successor. A delegation, consisting of Mr Lavery and Mr Ludovici was sent to Paris to sound him on the subject. "The proposal was very agreeable to me," says Rodin, relating the matter; "and I at once intimated my willingness to accept the nomination." The election was made before the end of 1903; and in the following January, for the third time within less than three years, there was a public greeting of the French master, and an equally public recognition of his talent. Accompanied by three Paris painters, Jacques Blanche, Cottet, and Fritz Thaulow, Rodin went quietly through the lionising, inevitable, excusable, justifiable even under the circumstances. The opening ceremony at the New Gallery, the dinner at the Café Royal, the visit to South Kensington Museum, with the students' welcome, who again unharnessed the horses and drew the master's carriage, are events too well remembered to need much dwelling upon. The newspapers mentioned all that occurred, and one thing, at least, that did not. The *Times* announced that the King received the sculptor at Buckingham Palace; and the *Sketch*, embellishing, added that the latter was amazed by his Majesty's wonderful knowledge of contemporary French art. Probably there was an interview proposed between the King and Rodin, but what is certain is that it did not take place.<sup>1</sup>

There was one speech at the dinner, that of Mr Edmund Gosse, which, by its representative character and its happy expression, was peculiarly interesting. In

<sup>1</sup> This proposed interview took place subsequently, during a visit of the sculptor to England in the spring of 1906.

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proposing the sculptor's health, he said that "it was nearly a quarter of a century ago that the genius of Monsieur Rodin was revealed to us. We recalled, in the Salon of 1881, those extraordinary works, 'La Création de l'Homme,' and, in bronze, the 'St John.' It would be the self-deception of memory if we pretended that we saw then in those works all that we saw in them to-day. There were young sculptors, like Coutan, like Lanson, like the unfortunate and gifted Idrac, who exhibited far more rhythm of line, a far more delicate finish of forms. But these tormented, arid figures of the new sculptor, if they scandalised and repulsed the eye trained in the academic tradition, at least arrested its attention. Who was there that night who could remember what graceful contribution Idrac made to the Salon of 1881? Who could forget the wasted and bitter anchorite which St John appeared to Monsieur Rodin's energetic vision? He could not conquer our convention at a blow, but he could shake it to its foundation, and he did. No one in the intelligent world looked at sculpture to-day exactly as he did before Monsieur Rodin put his mark upon it. It was too often forgotten that the appeal of genius is very diverse. There was a kind of genius which was the slave of man, and the indulger of his prejudices; there was another kind which was the noble companion and friend of his best thoughts, but there was yet another, very rarely revealed as the ages evolved, but, thank Heaven! even nowadays occasionally revealed, which was not the slave, nor the companion, but the tyrant of man's taste. To this class the genius of Monsieur Rodin belonged; he was one of the intrepid conquerors of the world of art. Every artist should live in his intelligence; but, if ever one had done so since the days of Phidias, it was Monsieur Rodin. He was not merely concerned, as other very excellent and admirable sculptors had been

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and still were, with brilliant problems of composition, learnedly carried out, with wonderfully refined modelling, with high competency of finish. These gifts he possessed ; but it was not of these that we thought when his work affected us most deeply. We then, with astonishment and joy, saw him labouring in the refulgence of the uncreated image, while his soul was visibly torn with agony until he could bring his vision to the birth. He sculptured as if he were singing, and this lyrical rapture which marked all that he produced was one of the most striking of his characteristics. We used to think of sculpture as of an art in dignified repose. We turned to Monsieur Rodin, and we saw torture and ecstasy, languishment and terror—all the primal passions of our race—quivering on the surface which enveloped the vehement creation of his dreams. In being permitted to welcome Monsieur Rodin that night, as the successor to Whistler in the presidency of this active and ambitious society of artists, they could not but express the hope that he would put his stamp on the spirit of all those who approached him. We welcomed him with peculiar warmth to English shores ; and it was perhaps nothing but national vanity which made us hope that, in the energy and roughness of our race, which was called barbaric by those who did not love us, he might even find something sympathetic to his own violent sentiment of truth. Monsieur Rodin succeeded that beautiful and winning spirit Whistler—a man more like the living flame of fire than any one he had ever known ; and the Society had shown its wisdom in choosing as successor to that incomparable man the only artist in Europe who could really be placed on a level with him.”

The few words pronounced by the master, in reply to the toast, did not satisfy those who would have wished for a long and eloquent discourse, or a witty speech, such as many of his countrymen can easily trip off the tongue.



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He would have required a smaller audience, two or three at most, and a given subject capable of inspiring him, to show how charmingly he can talk. Yet what he said had point. After apologising for his lack of oratory, and thanking them for his reception, he continued: "I should like to say what I think of art and nature, the real source of all beauty, but I think that you know it already. It is because my heart is filled with humility in the face of nature, and with admiration for nature, that you have called me among you. The reception of last night, so full of taste and made beautiful by the ladies of London, has occasioned a great stir; and, having seen those ladies, I cannot but think of the charming and noble pictures of Sir Thomas Lawrence at Burlington House. I am glad to be the president of your Society; and my great wish is to continue in the spirit of my regretted predecessor, Whistler—a great master, a hard worker, whose keen mind was so austere in art, and whose originality had such creative power. You honour also in me that work and painstaking which are the characteristics of art in all countries. I lift my glass to the success of our exhibition, and may tell you that your active sympathy has given me fresh strength and renewed youth. I drink also to the generous friends who, in 1902 and 1903, offered me banquets, precious souvenirs, to which will be added those of this evening."

Amid the general chorus of praise accorded to the new president, and to the six<sup>1</sup> specimens of his sculpture on view at the New Gallery, there were one or two discordant notes, but nothing beyond an allowable difference of opinion. The art critic in *Truth*, evidently no great admirer of Rodin, spoke of him as possessed of wonderful

<sup>1</sup> (1) A large plaster of the "Penseur," (2) a small bronze of the same, (3) "Bellona," (4) "La Patrie Vaincue" ("The Vanquished Mother-Country"), (5) "The Dream," (6) "A Torso of St John"—all but the first in bronze.



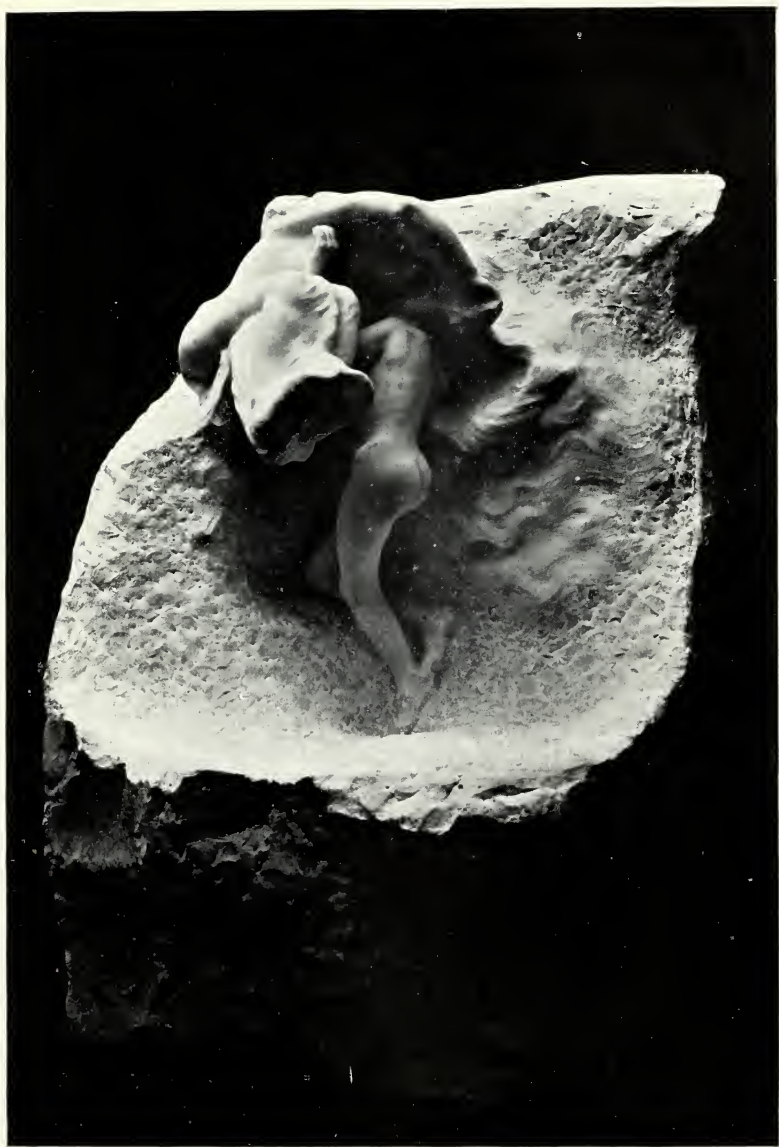
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power and virility, but limited in his art, incomprehensible mostly to the man in the street, a Walt Whitman or a Browning amongst the sculptors, a sculptor's sculptor ; in fine, just as George Meredith is a novelist's novelist, and Spenser a poet's poet. The fact is that the writer, who, by the title of his article, "Rodinesquerie," and the tone of it—somewhat flippant—had meant to be severe, dealt very gently with his man, and came near to blessing him.

Much interviewed at the time of his last visit, it would have been difficult for the master to be otherwise than complimentary, whatever might have been his reservations on some of the points about which his opinion was solicited. There is reason, however, to believe that he was quite sincere in all he expressed. One valuable quality he has in large measure, that of an unbiassed mind when viewing fresh phenomena. He said that he found English ladies and their dresses charming, and he does still. The fact of there being some types of both that would not warrant this epithet did not blind him to the existence of beauty, moral or physical, and of taste, where it was revealed to him. Opportunities had been previously afforded him of judging our English homes in their more modest as in their more elegant aspect and constitution. They pleased him greatly. He recurs to the subject now to say how well they tally with the national genius. It does not occur to him to make comparisons which would be to the detriment of one of the two nations. He likes to look on that which is fair in both. Such catholicity in taste, which does not mean indifference, has endeared him to Englishmen of very different temperament, whose unanimity in testifying to the good they receive from his acquaintance is better than any other eulogium. The letter which Mr Beckett wrote him in January, to welcome him again on English soil, breathes the same sentiments that appear in Henley's early epistles.

"I thank you heartily," he says, "for your kind note



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and your words that strike, touch, and enlighten the mind and imagination. Especially did you please me by telling me that I brought you luck by my faith in you. As one of our great poets expresses it, 'I needs must worship the highest when I see it.' . . . My faith and the luck it brings are only the reflection of your own genius in the spirit of your numerous enthusiastic admirers. Your kind hopes and wishes will receive a full realisation when the great bronze is finished, which is going to be magnificent."

If Rodin were to close this chapter himself, he would say that in return for what he has been able to give to our country, England has awakened in him new ideas, which he does not feel too old to receive and profit by. This is as it should be.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE "VICTOR HUGO" AND THE "UNFINISHED TASK"

HAD ambition been the stimulus of the master's activity throughout his career, he might have pronounced his "Nunc Dimittis" at the end of 1900. He had climbed to the summit of his art, he had received the laurel crown of victory; no one could have blamed him for retiring from further toil, and for spending his last years in rest and contemplation. That he continues working, that he will doubtless lay down the instruments of his handicraft only at the summons of death, is due to the love he bears his art. He cannot help modelling. It is part of his breathing and thinking. And then being so much a sculptor for the future, an innovator as well as a traditionist, it is well that his production should have to do with two centuries, that things begun in the nineteenth should be finished in the twentieth.

Up to now, no account has been given of the Victor Hugo monuments—for there are two. As neither of them is completely terminated, there is no inappropriateness in having delayed the notice and in speaking of them here. They have a common story and origin, and are the logical sequence of the busts and dry-point engravings executed in the poet's lifetime. The project for a statue from Rodin's chisel was informally made within a year or two after Victor Hugo died; but, as is often the case in such matters, there was considerable debate before the commission was officially given. In a letter to the sculptor two or three months before the opening of the 1889 Universal Exhibition, Monsieur



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Larroumet, then at the head of the Fine Arts Department, wrote: “I have the project at heart: if I have allowed it to remain in abeyance, necessity has been the reason; but it will soon be revived.” Meanwhile, the understanding was quite clear enough for a preliminary model to be begun. On the 11th of October 1889, Monsieur Larroumet said in another letter: “Don’t forget to send me word when your rough model of Victor Hugo is ready to be seen; I am very desirous of being the first to have a glimpse of it.” Monsieur Larroumet no doubt had his glimpse; but it was not until the middle of 1891 that the model was submitted to the committee. This appears by the two following extracts from the same correspondence as those above; the first is dated the 20th of February 1891: “Please tell me when your ‘Victor Hugo’ for the Pantheon will be finished, so that I may see it before bringing the committee”; the second, the 6th of June 1891: “Are you back? If so, we might appoint a day for the meeting of the committee.”

When the matter came on for consideration, the members of the committee appointed to give judgment had a painting made of the plaster model (which Rodin says he had executed about the size of Richelieu’s statue in the chapel of the Sorbonne, and intended to be about the same distance from the ground), and they had it stuck up very high with a huge mass of cardboard rock-work beneath. This altered the whole perspective; the impression was no longer what the sculptor had aimed at; and objections were brought against one and another detail which were tantamount to a refusal. It need hardly be said that Monsieur Larroumet’s opinion was different from that of the committee; and, as the sculptor was willing to submit a new group, the Director of the Beaux Arts arranged that the commission for the Pantheon should remain in his hands. Then, to emphasise his own appreciation of the original rough model, he, practically on his personal



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A different destination being now assigned to this group, Rodin decided to modify it, and, since it was to be placed amid an expanse of lawn and trees, to give it greater breadth. The second “Victor Hugo,” of heroic size, was represented half-sitting, half-recumbent, and nude, with the exception of the right leg and a little of the right side, on which the shawl or rug seems to have fallen from the shoulders. The identity of the two models is quite evident. Each detail in the change is apparently the result of the greater inclination of the body—the head turned rather more sideways, the right hand drawn back to the ear to help it in listening, the left leg stiffened, and the left hand raised in a commanding gesture. His couch is by the shore of his rocky isle of banishment, and voices come to him from over the sea, while he sits in mood like that which inspired the lines:—

“ O thou, whose billows ebb and flow  
Around the rock where drooping low  
I stayed my wing, yet hoping still.  
Thou that canst speed or sink the bark,  
Why dost thou call me in the dark?  
O sombre sea ! what is thy will ? ”

The voices were now personified by two muses instead of three. One of them is kneeling on the rock behind and above, and stoops over the poet's head with a pose of the arms that makes an arc to the line of his shoulders. This was the muse of history, bearing with her the cries of earth, the complaints of oppressed humanity, and rousing the hero to wrath and the exercise of his powers of satire. The second stands behind on the ground, bending and turning at the same time, in a pose of supplicating timidity, the hands lifted and half-hiding the face. This was meant for the muse of the idyll, the muse of tenderness, breathing sweet words and inspiring gentler feelings. Impassible, yet attractive, the strong man sits, a world

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of concentrated thought within him, reflected and made manifest through his outer swelling muscles and the energy of his frame. It has been already said that the plaster group of this Luxembourg monument was first seen in public at the New Salon of 1897. Four years later the figure of the poet in marble was exhibited there. At present, the two voices are being fashioned also in marble—one can be remarked in the studio of the Rue de l'Université,—and, in a year or two's time, it may be hoped, if not earlier, visitors to the Luxembourg Gardens will be able to enjoy a piece of statuary that posterity will certainly class among its most precious treasures.

The rough model of the second monument for the Pantheon was presented to the Sub-Committee for Works of Art in December 1892, and was forthwith approved. The many important commissions with which the sculptor was entrusted during the ensuing years, and the fact of his having the other "Victor Hugo" on hand, prevented much progress being made with this until quite recently. The small plaster group which exists in the museum at Meudon, shows the hero nude and standing under a cliff by the same sea-shore. His feet are entangled in briars and brambles as he walks, and, with his right arm bent in front and his left reaching down and outwards, he endeavours to advance. A winged female figure has swept down from the empyrean, and comes to a hovering poise, with her head near to his, by grasping her right foot with one hand while the other hand and foot are extended. Rodin has succeeded here in placing before us the sudden swoop and whirr of descending flight in a singularly vivid manner. It is Iris, the messenger of the gods, that he represents, swift with the swiftness attributed to her in the "Iliad," but without the tunic, her nudity sufficiently mantled by the spreading pinions. She brings the interpretation of the riddle the poet has been painfully seeking, the guiding light in ways



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of doubt, and is the countervailing influence to the three sirens of the sea that half emerge from the waves beneath him and that lure him—two with faces upwards to his and the third looking in the waters—murmuring reminiscences of joys and sorrows, invitations to oblivion.

The figure of the poet is the only portion of the monument which has been executed in its definite size. The plaster is now finished, and its translation into marble may be shortly expected. A torso of Iris has been for some time in existence in bronze at the Rue de l'Université, but of somewhat smaller dimensions than it will ultimately be given. These are the only data for guessing when the whole group will be ready for the Pantheon. Three years is not an unlikely estimate.

Since 1900, foreign interest in the sculptor's work has enormously increased. It would be almost tedious to enumerate the demands for specimens of his sculpture in museums<sup>1</sup> abroad, the invitations to participate in art exhibitions held during the last few years in various parts of Europe. Glasgow, Turin, Prague, Berlin, Venice, Düsseldorf have accorded in turn a place of honour to selected plaster copies of his statuary, as to the drawings that aided in their production. This wider diffusion of his masterpieces has furnished him with an excuse for indulging in more frequent journeys to other countries than his own. Italy, Austria and Germany have each had him within their frontiers.<sup>2</sup> “My wish now,” says the master, “would be to go to Greece. In fact, I have had the desire all my life, without ever finding an opportunity to realise it. I know what the country contains, at

<sup>1</sup> Stockholm, which refused in 1897, has since asked for a bust of Victor Hugo and a reduction of the “Bourgeois de Calais.”

<sup>2</sup> The University of Jena, in the last-mentioned country, where several exhibitions of the sculptor's works have been held during the last few years, notably at Berlin and Düsseldorf, conferred on Rodin, in 1905, the degree of Doctor *causâ honoris*. As an acknowledgment, a bust of Minerva has been presented to the University.



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my fingers' ends, having studied everything in books and museums. I think at present I should be prepared to see it."

At the Venice Exhibition of 1901, and not for the first time in Italy, there arose a similar clash of controversy to that so often heard in France. The Venetian public had been able to judge of Rodin's style in a previous international art exhibition four years before. Five plaster statuettes then represented him; and there was the "Age d'Airain" besides, which the city possessed permanently. But no great attention was paid until the specially arranged room with its nineteen pieces, some of them being copies of his most interesting and characteristic groups, on this occasion created an impression of surprise and wonder mingled with a good deal of disfavour. Hostile critics hastened to formulate the old accusations of errors in proportion and absence of plastic quality, or else of lack in the finish. Those who made this last charge would have done well to meditate on an observation of one of their own writers, Signor Corrado Ricci, who, in his monograph on Michael Angelo and speaking of a masterpiece of the great Florentine, says: "We cannot leave this statue, without repeating once more that we are convinced Michael Angelo intentionally kept part of it unfinished, and did so by artistic judgment." This disdain among professional art critics had been almost, if not quite, as marked in Rome. Its duration, however, was short. A more accurate knowledge of the differences noticed in the sculptor's productions altered people's ideas, and the pretended defects were found to be virtues. At Turin there would appear to have been a just estimate of Rodin's sculptural expression, as soon as the town had an occasion of studying it. The banquet offered him there in 1901, and the exhibition of the year after, made no great stir; but the cordiality and sincerity that reigned throughout the

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proceedings were an agreeable contrast to some of the master's other experiences.

Perhaps the most demonstrative welcome he has received on the Continent whilst travelling was at Prague in 1902. It was the Victor Hugo centenary celebration which brought about the visit, and, indeed, the sending of his statuary there. Among the foreign delegates who came to Paris in the month of February of that year to be present at the unveiling of the poet's monument, were some members of the Prague Czech Society, “Manes,” who, after inspecting the various busts of the hero by sculptors of name—and no name—inquired where was the one that Rodin had modelled. “Ah! you must go to Meudon, if you wish to be satisfied,” was the reply. As a matter of fact, the master had been invited to furnish a bust for erection in the Place Royale by the Sub-Committee of the Town Council, deputed to arrange this part of the day's doings; and he had promised his help, asking only two thousand five hundred francs to cover material expenses. After sending in his photograph of the bust, he was informed that another sculptor had made a more advantageous offer, which the Sub-Committee had accepted in preference to his. When this more advantageous sculptor sent in his bill, it amounted to twenty-five thousand francs.

The Prague delegates went to Meudon, beheld all the wonders of the museum, and returned home with such a glowing account that the master forthwith had proposals made him, the upshot of which was the Prague manifestation—a veritable Roman triumph. An inhabitant of that city, Karel B. Madl, writing about it in the French monthly review, *Les Maîtres Artistes*, says: “The Rodin Exhibition was an unexpected and sudden invasion, not an invasion of destructive barbarism in old culture, but an invasion of something strange, unheard of, victorious. Auguste Rodin appeared in Prague, wearing

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on his brows the golden crown of the conqueror, receiving homage as if he had been riding in a chariot along the Sacred Way. The enthusiasts in front drew after them the multitudes of the curious, who thronged about him with noisy acclamations. But in the first ranks, as in the last, there were men who remained abashed, taciturn, distrustful of their senses, because it seemed singular to them, something they could not take in all at once. They felt the strange grandeur of the phenomenon, and perceived it but obscurely." The journey was prolonged, and the Austrian capital visited. Here, too, the reception was cordial, but its effect was somewhat lessened by the festivities at Prague.

In 1903, the master received from the French Government the rank of Commander in the Legion of Honour. He had been created a Knight in 1888, as was said in Chapter V., and an officer of the same Order a few years later. His third promotion was further proof that, however banned and plotted against by coteries artistic or otherwise, the State and its ministerial representatives continued to esteem him. Some of his pupils and disciples in sculpture conceived the happy idea of celebrating the event in a novel fashion. They got up a picnic for the last day in June at Vélizy, near Chaville; and quite a pleasant party assembled to meet the sculptor and his wife. Besnard, Fritz Thaulow, Mirbeau and other friends were there; and lunch was served out of doors in a convenient glade on a greensward, where a column had been erected, surmounted by a well-known torso from the Meudon Museum. After the repast, three toasts were drunk, each proposed by a sculptor who had worked for Rodin—Jean Baffier, Emile Bourdelle and Lucien Schneeg, whose eulogiums and confessions bore eloquent witness to what they had learnt from him. For the text of these speeches, too long to be inserted here, but highly interesting, the reader is referred to the July



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## The “Victor Hugo,” etc.

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number of the *Plume* in 1903. One or two paragraphs of Baffier's will give the keynote:—

“All the companions that surround you,” he said, “have thought that this modest banquet ought to be especially a corporative feast, because your glory sheds lustre on our handicraft, and it is of a superior interest for us to have you as a leader. Your benevolence is proverbial; and, whenever we happen to miss what we aim at in our works, you have always a kind word which comforts us and encourages us to further effort. Always compassionate to the humble and ready to serve them, you awaken in us a noble emulation by your deliberate and lofty critical sense. It is therefore the great French sculptor we are honouring to-day, the President also of our group; and, above all, it is the venerated friend, the admirable master whose incontestable authority soars above the petty interests of party.”

A sentence of Bourdelle is most significant:—

“The influence of your art is so deep, so extensive, so inevitable, that none of us (if he has understood you) would wish to conceive himself, would wish to conceive his own science bereaved of yours.”

Gathering round the column, the picnic party were photographed; then Fritz Thaulow, whose skill on the violin was taken advantage of, played an air with three accompanists; and Miss Isidora Duncan, an American lady, known in Paris by her rhythmic interpretations of Beethoven's music, rose and danced on the greensward, resuscitating as far as might be the terpsichorean art of old. The scene was one altogether suited to the master's tastes; and his enjoyment, apart from the homage done him, was very keen.

The frequent articles that have appeared in reviews and newspapers during the last three or four years have kept the reading public fairly well informed of Rodin's recent work. Part of it still consists in enlargements of

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groups already existing, such as "Francesca and Paolo," "Ugolino and his children," and the "Thinker," the last of which, as has been said in an earlier chapter, has been presented to the town of Paris. Some again runs parallel to work of twenty years ago with a tendency to more complex grouping in the same simplicity of planes.

As an example, may be mentioned the "Creation of Woman," which represents Eve just issued from Adam's side, with the creating hand above them, enveloped in cloud. Although Eve is fully formed, there is an interlacing of lines in the juxtaposition of the two bodies which artistically translates the story and fits it.

A "Prometheus Bound" on his rock is strangely like a martyr on his cross. In this and one or two other subjects of like import, there is a return to figures in high or low relief on the rough block. The accompaniment of man's suffering by woman's consolation is characteristic of these compositions and unites the sculptor's two modes of expression, the one severer, the other softer.

Perhaps too little attention has been paid to the master's performance in the sculpture of children. The other phases of his art have rather thrown it into the background. In the autumn of his career, he gives a reminder that his taste for it, as well as his talent, has not been lost. On a couple of pediments, executed for the Baron Vita, the friezes setting off the main subject — an allegory of the four seasons — show a merry troop of chubby little figures playing, quite in Rodin's best and vigorous style. At Meudon also, there exists what, for want of a name which has not been given, might be called the "Babes in the Wood." There is a wee three-year-old boy nursing and embracing a tinier two-year-old girl. Its sentiment, *ceteris paribus*, may be compared to that of the "Baiser."

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A last example of parallel work is the "Athlete," as yet only in its first reduced size of the clay model. The pose is vaguely like that of the "Thinker," the position of the arms and the slant of the body being different, and the face being all visible. A young American sat for it, a man of remarkable shoulder breadth and muscular development in the chest and back.

Then, again, there is work which, in each succeeding appearance of it, is the passing thought and feeling of the sculptor materialised without any relation between the pieces, except the master's mind. A small production of this kind will be mentioned in the conclusion. Another, not quite so new, is the "Soul and the Body," which figured at the 1904 Weimar Exhibition in Germany. Rodin would have liked to send more to this old town with its Goethe associations. But the contribution made to the Düsseldorf Exhibition earlier in the same year made a larger participation impossible, especially as he had the fatigue of his journey to the former town. The "Soul and the Body" is a variation on the theme of the Greek centaur. By the fabled offspring of Ixion and the Cloud, the Greeks must have wished to indicate, at least, the gradation, if not the opposition of two forms of life, one lower, one higher. In his centaur Rodin has brought out the intensity of the cry, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" On glancing first at this piece of statuary, one is surprised at its length; the human body of slender proportions, standing outwards as well as up from the body of the horse, and so different from the brawny form of the Greek centaur. Then, as one continues to look, the long straining of the soul is felt through the symbol, and the modelling is seen to beautifully express it. As Count Robert de Montesquiou remarks, both subject and execution would be the appropriate adornment of a mausoleum. And similarly, the "Last

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Vision," a marble bas-relief, which shows the head of a dying man almost over the bourn of existence, and, above, the face of his beloved—wife or betrothed—beheld at the supreme moment.

In the museum at Meudon stands a plaster model of a monument to the memory of Puvis de Chavannes, which Rodin undertook some years ago at the request of the National Society of Fine Arts, and which, when finished, will be erected in Paris. The monument consists of a bust copied from the one already described in Chapter VI., which is placed on a small altar, after the Greek custom. On the left, stands a male figure, allegorically representing Eternal Repose.<sup>1</sup> The statue is a worthy companion of the bust. Both posture and feature are full of melancholy grace, but with avoidance of any theatrical gesture. Rising from the ground behind the altar is a tree that overshadows both bust and statue, and serves as a grove of quiet contemplation. Rodin confesses to have intentionally arranged all—the slender trunk, the branches and leaves not too thick, so as to obtain silhouettes capable of standing out against the sky, and yet in a manner mingling with it. This was the Greek idea.

With the exception of the "Thinker" on the Place du Panthéon, no statuary from Rodin's hand adorns a great public square in Paris. It is quite time that this inadequate representation should be complemented. If the "Balzac" is not to receive, in the sculptor's life-time, the honour due to it, there is that fine masterpiece, "The Bourgeois de Calais," which, as it commemorates an event interesting the whole nation, might with propriety be erected in the "Jardin du Carrousel." Such a scheme would appeal to all Frenchmen; and England and America, who were historically connected with the real drama, could, in another spirit, share in its sculptural representa-

<sup>1</sup> This was in the 1900 Pavilion.





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tion, giving it an international sanction and approval. The preference of the writer, as was hinted in the chapter on the “Magnum Opus,” would be to see the “Tower of Labour” find its home in Paris. There is a conception of universality in it that commends it to every mind, and its execution by international subscription would be one way of acknowledging the influence of art—and of Rodin’s art in particular—in drawing men and nations closer together. For Rodin may claim to have given of his best, both in teaching and in sculpture, without respect of persons or frontiers. As the object of his study is nature, so the object of his sympathies is humanity. “There will have to be a united Europe; its various countries must come together, if they are to continue to live and flourish,” is one of his utterances, which is equivalent to saying—with the master’s intention—that there must be a morally united world; since, with a united Europe, the question of universal peace would be settled. While it is evident that so great issues are not within the grasp of any one man, it is equally plain that each great man helps to forge the links of a larger fraternity. This, in truth, is the sculptor’s unfinished task, which he will have to confide to others, but with the consciousness of having done his part.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MEUDON, AND THE RODIN OF THE PRESENT

IT is no labour to write about the Rodin of the present, since the documents are ready to hand—the man himself, his studios, his home and museum. One thing is characteristic of all, simplicity, extreme simplicity. In the sculptor, it is the outward, visible signs of a sincere, strong mind, ennobled by its dominating passion, and serene in the presence of all and everyone. It has enabled him to behave in each of the critical events of his career with an unruffled dignity that has compelled the respect of his bitterest opponents; and it gives him perfect manners and a gentle courtesy towards high and low. An example of this last trait was furnished to the present writer, as he was one Sunday morning sitting in conversation with the sculptor in the latter's house. The old servant suddenly intruded, bringing in a little girl of the peasant class, who was shyly holding some small object wrapped up in a handkerchief, and who managed to articulate, "Please, sir, father has sent you this, thinking that perhaps you might like to have it." Interrupting his chat, and carefully unfolding the handkerchief, Rodin found inside a small fragment of ornamental spa, which the man had no doubt dug up somewhere and imagined to have some value, but which was quite worthless. Examining the object with a kindly smile, Rodin wrapped it up once more, told the child to thank her father for letting him see it, returned it to her, but without any gesture or word of refusal, and ordered his servant to give the little visitor some cake and an orange.





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Age has brought about in the sculptor's frame and appearance more than one change since the time when his portrait was painted in the 'eighties. The hair, which he wears shorter, has turned grey ; so has the wavy beard, which is still long, and has the same twists as in the likenesses of Sargent and Carrière, but is somewhat more pruned. The body has become thicker, without being positively stout, and the cheeks fuller and ruddier. The cast of the face is, as always, massive—the furrows of the forehead being ploughed deeper, however, and the expression more varied than of old ; to watch the transitions is most interesting for anyone that cares for the study of physiognomy ; there is much philosophy hidden under the eyelids, much dry and sly humour lurking round the mouth, much latent force in his slow speech, yet not laboured, and much, much illumination in flashes when his ideas lead him up to heights of intuitional perception.

A short, thick-set man, Rodin walks with a slight roll in his gait, somewhat as a sea captain.<sup>1</sup> In his dress, he prefers the comfortable to the elegant. Except when in black frock coat and suit for visits, he prefers for home and studio a short tweed jacket and suit to match, over which, in the cold weather, he dons a long, loose garment, with a cap ; and he not unfrequently at Meudon puts on wooden shoes. As he is nearly always about among the clay and plaster, it is not uncommon to see his clothes streaked with white, a detail of which he is quite oblivious. The only sign of forethought in matters of toilet is the daily visit of the barber who comes to trim his hair and beard ; but even this would seem to be tolerated rather than desired ; for sometimes, if there is

<sup>1</sup> Curiously enough, this peculiarity, which no one else seems to have noticed, was confirmed by a story which the sculptor related to the present writer on the latter's mentioning his impression. "I remember," said Rodin, "that one day, in a seaport town, I was followed by a drunken sailor who persistently abused me. I found out after that he had mistaken me for his former captain, against whom he had a grudge."

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anything occupying his attention, the hairdresser gets his dismissal by means of an intimation that he can content himself with attending to Madame.

His manner of living is quite in conformity with what has been said of his character. Usually, an early riser, he is mostly at work before half-past seven. A bowl of milk generally serves him for breakfast, which, as often as not, Madame Rodin takes to him in one of the studios; otherwise he would forget to come and drink it. If lunch and dinner are more substantial, they are equally plain. The lighter dessert makes a good half of the meal, and the wine is plentifully mixed with water. On Sunday in winter, he may remain in bed now and again till half-past eight or nearly nine, but the extra nap is rather a consequence of the fatigue caused by his Saturday afternoon receptions, which are more numerously attended in winter.

These receptions are held in the studio of the Rue de l'Université, where he is accustomed to work in the afternoon. There are, in reality, two rooms, so to speak, lofty cells, and well lighted through immense glass windows running across the whole front, but without any pretensions to elegance. Other similar rooms belonging to painters and sculptors are in the same one-storied row, and probably Rodin's are the least ornamental of all, except for the precious statuary they contain. The floors are of asphalt, the walls are white-washed, the accessories, a few chairs and just the paraphernalia necessary for the posing of models; and for the rest, a most primitive stove in each. The groups that assemble are partly old friends, who never tire of returning to contemplate the familiar forms in stone, marble, plaster and bronze that have almost become part of the furniture, and who are best capable of distinguishing that which has grown into existence since their last visit; there are also strangers whom the sculptor's ever-increasing

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renown has attracted thither. These last belong to all nations. One week, it is a group of Russians headed by the Director of the Porcelain Manufactory of the Empire ; another, it is Mr Carnegie, whose mundane preoccupations by no means prevent him from excursions into the more ethereal regions of art. Among the visitors Rodin walks about as happy as a child, dropping a few words that give the summary of what he has done in this or that piece of sculpture, and show, as far as may be, how he did it. The lighting up of his face at these moments is one of the most refreshing sights imaginable. There is no vanity but the reflection of the artist's joy at having seized and rendered permanent one of nature's evanescent visions. Watching him, the line beginning Keats' "Endymion" comes into one's mind :—

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

Together with the visitor, he admires over again the beauty of the thing or the thing of beauty he has produced ; and one feels it is the result rather than the handiwork which is the object of his admiration. He forgets his share and thinks of the joy. "Yes, it is pretty, the arms, the little feet,"<sup>1</sup> he says, his eyes caressing the children in marble or stone, some of whom he always has about him in the studio. "And this 'Death of Alcestis,' it looks better in the box which frames it and constitutes a sort of tomb."<sup>1</sup> The wife of Admetus is sitting on her husband's knees. She is going to die for him ; and hiding her face against his breast, she sobs out her good-bye. "Mercury is waiting near them to take her to Hades," the sculptor continues, "he is better than the husband, and weeps. I tried to put a little of Glück's melody into my composition. I don't know whether I have succeeded."<sup>1</sup> A thought strikes him. "It would be still more effective," he says, taking his

<sup>1</sup> These words of conversation are related by Mlle. Judith Cladel.

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handkerchief and spreading it over the knees of his group, "if the knees were concealed. See, the eye had too much to look at. Now that the lower portion is draped, all the attention is concentrated on the faces and the embrace. There are no longer too many planes of vision. If I carry this rough sketch any further, it will no doubt be like that."<sup>1</sup>

One of the penalties of greatness is to have one's time encroached on, and Rodin's fame is no exception to the rule. The master finds it more and more difficult to keep his working hours free. Yet he meets interruptions without fussiness. The inevitable ones he endures with patience, the others he avoids when he can by innocent ruses that offend no one. When supplementary duties fall upon him, such, for instance, as the annual judging in connection with his presidency of the section of sculpture in the "Société Nationale des Beaux Arts,"<sup>2</sup> he will be up and off to Paris at an hour when most well-to-do people are asleep, so as to get through his task and be able to perform the ordinary day's work into the bargain.

To those who are able to appreciate his art, he is peculiarly indulgent, and, if they are women, the indulgence is the greater. "In general," he says, "women understand me better than men. They are more attentive. Men listen too much to their friends; so that they are spoilt while in the hands of the professor. Then I am inclined to find them stupid, which is certainly a mistake; for I have one or two men pupils who are exceedingly gifted. Perhaps I ought not to call them pupils since they have natural genius."<sup>3</sup> Tender to the foibles of others, Rodin will sometimes carry the feeling to the extent of organising a musical party at which the performers are not always of the highest order. He will

<sup>1</sup> These words of conversation are related by Mlle. Judith Cladel.

<sup>2</sup> National Society of Fine Arts. <sup>3</sup> Related by Mlle. Judith Cladel.



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listen with deference ; and, though of fine musical taste, will find nothing to criticise. The pleasure he has given to others makes the performance sufficient. This sort of courtesy is his only concession to conventionalism ; and in him, indeed, it is hardly conventional.

From Paris society he has consistently lived apart. Even when resident in the city, he cared nothing for it ; and, now that his dwelling is in the country, he regards it as a stranger would. His disinclination to mingle in it has nothing to do with false modesty or a consciousness of inability to hold his own in its midst. On the contrary, when forced to go among the great ones of the world, he seems superior rather than inferior to them, no doubt because his genius really makes him so ; but also because his perception goes deeper than the veneer of clothes and mannerism, and knows men and women for what they are worth. His eloquence, however,—for eloquent he can be,—is freer among those whose sympathy he feels to be more than fashionable curiosity. If he is in a mood for conversation, the language is precise, terse and abundant, though measured ; and, if the sober gestures are those of the man from the north, there is the picturesqueness of a lively, sensuous imagination. Fond as he is of talking on his art, he neither dogmatizes nor sermonises—he persuades. His method—probably he would not call it a method—is Socratean. He leads to the truth, without seeking to confute an adversary's opinion by demolition. While disclaiming the teacher's rôle, he is ever willing to advise students that go to him for help. His criticisms then are brief, but, as they infallibly and directly discover the weak points, and as a touch of the thumb or finger, a fillip here or there to the model submitted, accompany the word spoken, the brevity contains the soul of wit.

The present home of Rodin, the "Villa des Brillants," is situated on the heights of Meudon, overlooking the

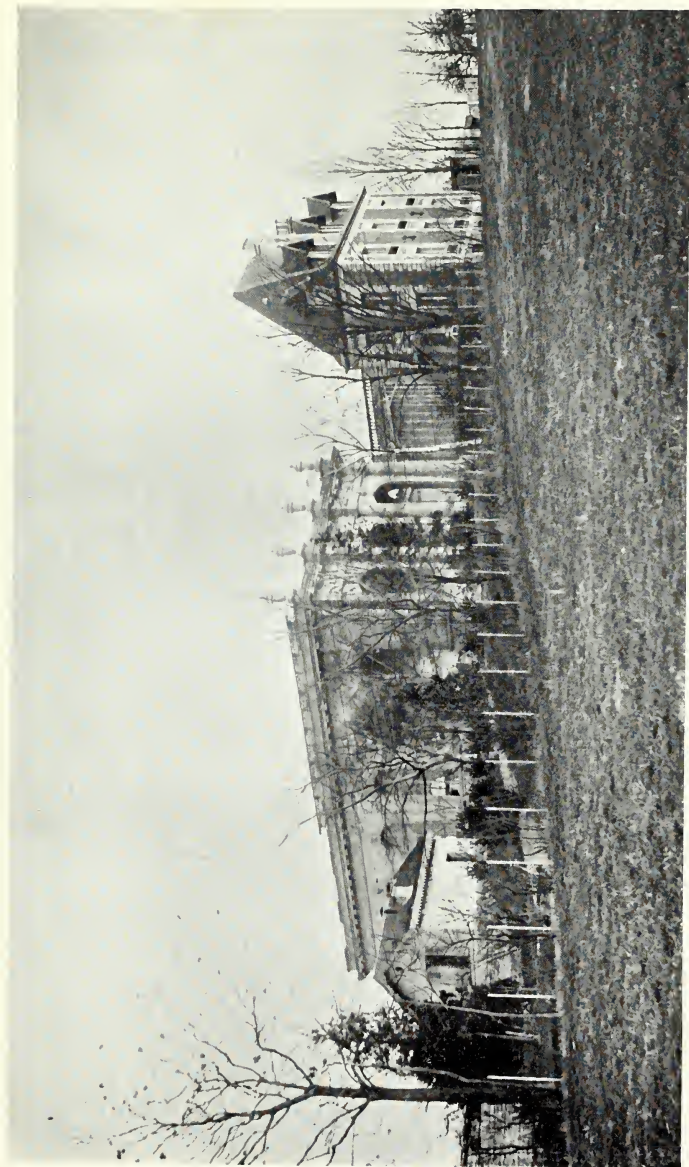


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Seine in the direction of Sèvres and Saint Cloud, and is about a couple of kilometres distant from the western fortifications. No less than three railways now run within a short distance of it, one on the heights and crossing the valley by means of a lofty viaduct, the two others in the valley itself. There are also three stations of easy access, not to speak of tramways and the river. Yet, in spite of these connecting links with the great city, and the possibility of reaching it under the half hour, the elevation of the site places the sculptor in a region undisturbed by noise, and practically isolated from the villages that lie around.

The house is of nondescript kind. Originally, it was a single-fronted, red brick building in Louis XIII. style, with two stories over the ground floor. The gable-end forms the porch side, the roof is of steep slant, and the topmost windows rise out of it with gables and roofs of their own. Subsequently, a wing, in brick and plaster, was added on the east side, in the shape of a vast room as high as the second story of the original structure, and having its whole length. The upper part of its long outer wall is one series of large windows; the roof is partly of glass, the front is of wood and has large doors. Evidently, it has served for a painter's studio. In fact, the house was built by a lady artist, Madame Durand de Coll, from whom Rodin bought it. The kitchens are below stairs, and round the yard are out-houses which might serve as stabling, but which are used for keeping Madame Rodin's pet birds—pigeons and canaries, and for containing the sculptor's archives. Several dog-kennels in the yard have each an occupant; they are pets, but they have their utility in this lonely abode surrounded by fields. As the visitor mounts the porch steps, he notices on his left a small room, nearly all in glass, that joins into the east wing. In it are an old-fashioned sideboard, and an equally old-fashioned



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cupboard. A few miniature pieces of antique sculpture make their appearance there now and again, with a trestle-table, at which a workman will be sitting. It is a place capable of being turned to more than one purpose.

Inside, the house is explained by the personality of its owner. To people accustomed to modern luxury in furniture, it must appear strange. Carpets there are none—at any rate, on the ground floor. The oak floors are clean and waxed, that is all. In the small sitting-room on the right, there is a white centre-table, a writing-desk, two or three white chairs, two small side-tables, and nothing more except four pictures, two, at least, being gifts from the friends who painted them, Eugène Carrière and Claude Monet. The dining-room opens into this by folding doors. It is a larger apartment, long and narrow. An oblong trestle-table, painted white, occupies almost the entire length of it, and white cane-bottomed chairs stand round. The dinner cloth covers the table as a rule, together with some of the service. Over and on the mantel-piece at the further end of the room is a large unframed picture presented to the sculptor by Falguière. The studio drawing-room comes nearest to the modern type, but the transformation is not yet achieved. A number of valuable pictures, both large and small, stand on the floor against the walls. On the side opposite the windows is a tester bedstead—simply the wood-work—in ancient wood, so ancient that it has turned black, and wonderfully carved; and along the side of the windows is a long narrow mahogany side-board covered with rarities of antique art. In one corner is a cupboard filled with tiny statuettes of Japanese or other origin; in a second corner a costly wardrobe; along the back end-wall a huge, lofty bookcase, with glass, silk-lined doors, and containing a most miscellaneous selection of books, many of them presents from celebrated authors. Among the English ones are three from Henley,

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the first bearing the inscription: "Poems, a Book of Verses, London Voluntaries"; and inside the dedication: "W. E. Henley to his friend Rodin. 18-2-98." The two others were given only the year before the donor's death. One is "Views and Reviews," with "W. E. H. to Rodin. 5-5-02," on the inside cover, and the other, "Hawthorn and Lavender." The dedication of this third, in French, like the preceding ones, and dated "13-2-1902," is as follows: "To Auguste Rodin. I would to God, my dear friend, that you could read what is in it. I believe you will find in it both workmanship and feeling." One or two tables, a suite of chairs, with a sofa and screen, complete the contents of the room. In fine, the inspection of the ground floor will convince any one who really knows the sculptor that its Spartan severity and apparent incongruity of arrangement are due—to-day, at any rate,—not to material necessity, but to the fact that the master's love of beauty is satisfied by the nature of the fields abroad and his own plastic reconstitution of her fair forms. He himself says: "It seems strange to some that I keep my drawing-room so; but it allows me to have under my hand the things I have collected for my pleasure. I like to take them up as I pass by, which would be difficult if everything were in regulation order."

And, indeed, with such a landscape visible from all the windows, the most luxurious furniture would lose its charms. Down, down in the valley, one sees from the porch the Seine flowing and curling towards the north, through the Sèvres bridge in the distance, until the heave of the hills of St Cloud sweeps round in front of it and forces it to turn eastwards. The valley itself bifurcates at Meudon and runs inland, west by north, between Bellevue on the Sèvres side and Fleury towards Paris. It is a lovely hollow—the Val they call it—with a wealth of trees and vegetation climbing the heights that enclose it. Hundreds of pretty residences, with red-tiled roofs



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and white or coloured walls, nestle everywhere from top to bottom, giving just the contrasts of tints that satisfy the eye. As one stands in the portico of the museum, under an arcade that faces the river and supplies a frame, there is a picture with all the requisites that an artist could desire of sky, ground, water, perspective. In certain lights the transfiguration is ethereal.

Riverwards and in front of the house, close to it but on the eastern side, so as not to block the view, is the great museum, the pavilion that served for the Exhibition of the Place de l'Alma in 1900, re-erected in the sculptor's own grounds, but abutting on what formerly was a separate property, and which Rodin acquired at a convenient moment for the purpose of adding to his studios. The property, when bought, consisted of a fair-sized piece of ground, with a cottage in the middle, a low long summer-house skirting one side of the garden, and a tiny outhouse. The museum, now that the division has been removed, occupies the top end ; the cottage immediately beyond it is used for occasional visitors ; the summer-house has become a sanctum where the sculptor keeps a few of his antiquities, and where he sometimes retires to work alone or to chat with a friend ; and the garden, over which a seated Buddha presides, remains with its boundary wall, in the midst of the outer, encircling grounds of the Villa des Brillants, laid out for the growth of fruit trees, but the abode also of rose trees, whose blossoms appear when the fruit blossoms have fallen. Carriages that come to the villa must approach by the Avenue Paul Bert. From the main gate of the avenue, a primitive sort of drive, bordered with trees, leads down to the backyard, which must be entered in order to pass along the side of the villa and arrive at the porch entrance. Still east of the principal block and behind the museum, there is another building—a workshop, for the rough hewing of statues, and

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between it and the house stand two pretty little one-storied, red-brick edifices used as repositories for the conservation of the sculptor's numerous miniature models that cannot be put elsewhere, and furnishing a nook to which the master betakes himself—when he does not want to be found anywhere else.

The great museum looks outwardly much the same as when it adorned its original site. Inside, there are permanent fittings—the huge glass cases, cupboards, and tables heaped and packed with statuary and fragments; but there are figures of all sizes draped in brown holland, which are not always in the same place and are not always the same statues. It is the changeable element; and, when a drapery is raised, one cannot feel sure of beholding the statue seen there before. The number also increases and diminishes, so that successive visits have their little surprises; the curiosity is continually whetted; one never knows with Rodin what he has in store. The one thing certain is that in these pieces of sculpture, new and old, there lies the history of a life for him who can read it.

It is possible for the casual visitor to go a good many times to Meudon and yet not discover the existence of another museum—a more recent acquisition of the sculptor—which is situated quite at the bottom of the valley westwards from the villa, and almost a quarter of a mile away. It is an old-fashioned, three-storied house of decent size, plastered and whitewashed, with a strip of garden belonging to it that comes up the hill to within a short distance of the villa grounds; there Rodin is at present engaged in organising and arranging, on the one hand, his collection of Gothic fragments, some originals, some, indeed most, plaster casts,<sup>1</sup> which he has

<sup>1</sup> These casts have been taken by sculptors entrusted with the repairing or replacing of some old parts of a cathedral; first, a mould in clay was made of the piece, and then the plaster cast poured into the mould.

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picked up in the course of his travels, or through the medium of an obliging amateur, on the other, his own fine series of pencil studies executed at various periods for his sculpture. The latter having been noticed in the chapter devoted to the drawings and dry-point engravings, there is no need to add more than this indication of their whereabouts. That they should be found side by side in the same shrine as carvings executed under the religious impulse is significant, and is an extra confirmation of the remark made in the first chapter anent the double source of Rodin's inspiration. To the profane and careless glance, these mutilated fragments of the ancient Gothic carvers may not have much to say; but, in the master's presence, under his kindling eye, and with his enthusiastic exposition, the hearer must be dull who does not get an inkling of the artistic intention as well as of the realisation. He is initiated into the mystery of curves, the relation of each line to the spectator for whom it was intended, into the genuine simplicity that stamps the work, together with that science of durability with which it was performed.

These museums are more peculiarly Rodin's "habitat." They suit him and he suits them. It is there perhaps that he is seen to the best advantage, where with a step he can unveil an illustration and point a sentence with visible fact. His is a complex character; and, as with all that are so, different phases of it are manifested to different men. Some people believe that he cares little for any one and anything outside his sculpture, that he loves only by his art and in his art. If there are artists of this kind, Rodin is not of the number. A loveless life at any period would have had small value for him. An essential requirement of his soul is feminine affection, with the best that it can give, steadfast sympathy. It was fortunate for him that, so soon after the death of his sister, he met with a woman capable of it; it is fortunate for him that she has

## The Life of Rodin

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been spared to keep up the supply. Concurrently with this, he has always experienced the attraction of female beauty, but less of the purely sensual than of that which is accompanied and constituted by qualities of mind giving characteristic animation to the body. Whether he acknowledges it or not—and some of his conversation lends colour to an accusation that he is lacking in this respect—he is haunted by ideals which he divines through outward forms. Woman is the chief medium of the vision.

Intimate, man's friendship of the David and Jonathan kind, does not seem to have come into his life, be this said without disparagement of the intercourse that has existed between him and such men as Legros and Carrière and others. And yet he would have welcomed it. Reserved characters have often the keener desire for communion. Failing it, he has continued to cultivate nature's acquaintance, approaching her, however, not through the 'ologies, but through untiring contemplation. In a tenacious will of the kind he possesses, there are defects possible as well as virtues, together with large patience and tenderness, a danger of falling into hardness and prejudice. The corrective lies in the man's capacity for growth and modification. Unlike the ordinary individual who becomes hidebound often before arriving at middle age, Rodin has gone on developing up to the present. His mental and moral framework are larger than they were in middle life, and the muscles that move it, stronger. The risk run by most celebrities of being monopolised by curiosity-mongers who load them with flattery in order to rob them of their time, comes too late in his career to do him much harm. If praise is sweet to him now, there are no signs of his being puffed up by it; and he is far more ready to take up the cudgels in order to defend his interpretation of nature than to quote eulogiums of himself. In fact, he abstains entirely from repeating them.





VIEW IN THE GARDEN AT MEUDON





# The Rodin of the Present

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A charge jestingly made, but perhaps seriously meant, is that he is self-concentrated and secretive with a strain of Norman wiliness and cunning. If the two latter terms are understood in the sense of Scotch shrewdness, they may stand as being near the mark. The self-concentration and secretiveness are in great measure caused by the constant necessity of being on his guard against threatened attacks. When a man is thus exposed, he can hardly be blamed for caution that may sometimes appear excessive.

What are Rodin's opinions? Is he Conservative or Liberal, is he Monarchist or Republican, is he orthodox or heterodox? Since he does not parade his opinions or wear his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at, it is unsafe to say much on the point, and the matter has not a great importance. Opinions are unstable, except in people that cannot see far, and it is likely that the master has more than once burned what formerly he adored. The story goes that, of an evening, when he takes the train to return to Meudon, he may be seen regularly to buy an ultra-Conservative paper, seat himself in the carriage, put on his spectacles, and deliberately read it through from beginning to end. But then it is also related that on one occasion, when travelling with a famous painter from Paris to a distant town in France, he got out and bought a fresh paper at each station. There are some things he does without paying much attention! From the government, or rather from the ministers who have been at the Fine Arts Department, and have consequently been in relations with him, he has always met with support, and acknowledges it freely; in fact, his struggle with academic officialism would have been still harder but for the wise helping hand held out at critical moments by the minister then in power. Doubtless, he respects the established constitution of his country because it commands the adhesion of the majority of his

# The Life of Rodin

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fellow-citizens. For the rest, he has been long enough in the world to realise that what is proper for one people may not be so good for another. His temperament makes him inclined to oppose revolutionary upheavals. In Russia, he would find a word to say for autocracy, in England for traditionalism, and in France he would fain preserve some of the old amid the incoming of the new. There is assuredly a touch of Ruskin in his mental attitude towards the problems of the present; and his solutions, as far as they go, are referable more to individual than to collective action. Some of his conversation on the religious topic having been already recorded, enough may be gathered from it to be convinced that his thought is far from the materialism that has invaded a great deal of modern art no less than of modern science. Spiritualist in his conception of things, he is independent in his reflections. His philosophy may be less intellectual than that of men whose training and opportunities have enabled them to formulate everything in logical propositions, but feeling and intuition compensate for its vagueness.

This, however, is not to assert that Rodin is wanting in culture outside the limits in which he has specialised himself. There are men who show all they know in an hour, and others whose knowledge lies latent and will continue to crop up unexpectedly for years. Rodin belongs to the latter category. Quite recently he was lamenting his ignorance of the English language, to which a person present, whose age might excuse him for forgetting his classics, replied that it was never too late to learn, since Cicero began studying Greek letters when he was over sixty. "Not Cicero," retorted the sculptor quietly, "he was versed in Greek when quite young." "I meant Cato," corrected the gentleman, rather ashamed to have made the slip.

One source of the master's knowledge is his close observation of things. Rightly cultivated in his case, it

# The Rodin of the Present

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has yielded immense profit. He observes through every sense and through all combined ; and, as he owns, he often gains a valuable idea from the most superficial remarks. Even in the nomenclature of his masterpieces, he is not above adopting a name suggested by chance, provided his judgment approves. As an example, may be taken the group of two statues, composed of two kneeling figures—a man and a woman,—the man on a lower ground in a position signifying his subjugation by his companion's loveliness. "Ah! the eternal idol," commented a Member of Parliament,<sup>1</sup> who with a party of friends was visiting the studio. The remark was made without reflection ; but the sculptor none the less noted it, considered the name, and found that, better than another title, it would suit the work.

Whatever one may learn from him about men and things that have come into his life during his chequered career—and a great deal may be learnt in an indirect way—most noticeable is the habit he has of saying nothing about individuals which might present them in a really unfavourable light ; and to men that have enjoyed his friendship he is invariably generous, even if incidents have occurred—and such will occur in every intercourse—to interrupt or change their mutual relations. Allusion was made in an earlier chapter to the coolness that arose between him and Dalou at the end of the 'eighties. There is no need to go further into details as to the causes of the rupture ; but a word or two may be added of a conversation in which the present writer ventured to repeat to the sculptor what he had gleaned elsewhere on the matter, and to ask how far these accounts tallied with facts. Rodin replied in a tone which breathed nothing but kindness. "We had been so long friends," he said, "and whatever did occur of an unpleasant nature could not wipe out the memory

<sup>1</sup> Monsieur Rivet.

# The Life of Rodin

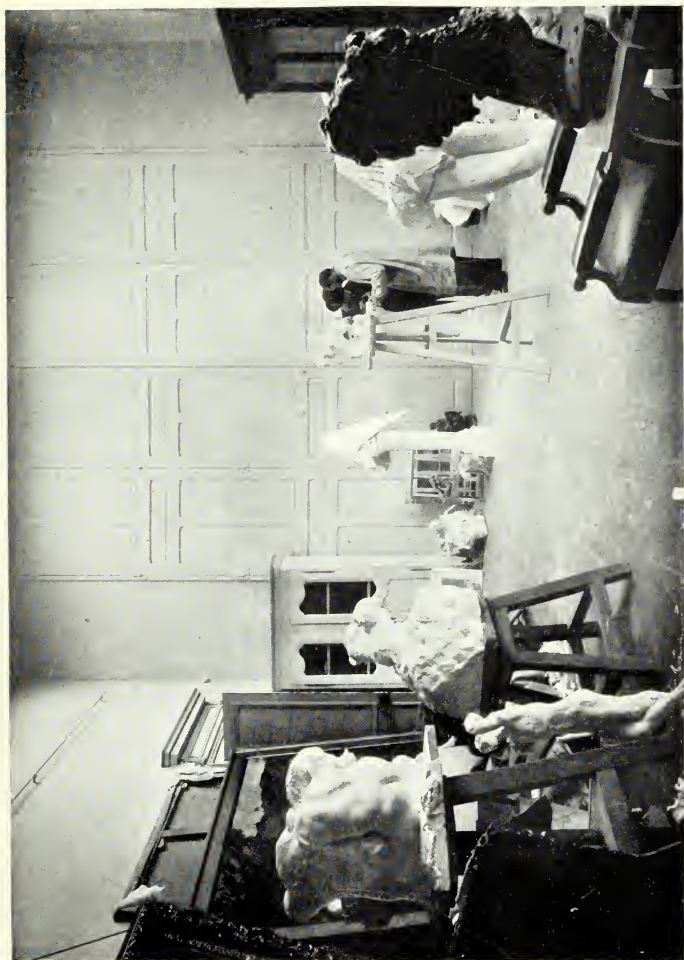
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of it or destroy the old feeling. I heard only when it was too late that Dalou had expressed in his illness a wish I should go and visit him. It pained me a good deal that he died without our seeing each other again. Had I been informed of his desire, I should have gone at once."

The quality just illustrated is more than discretion or prudence. Consistently manifested, and unostentatiously withal, it argues a nature's gentleman. If further testimony were needed to prove the sterling goodness of his heart, it is supplied by those who have been or are still in his employ. The men of greater fame are proud to speak of their having served him, and those of less are content to remain with him. "Why should I change," says Monsieur Mathet, who does more for Rodin than for any other sculptor. "I should lose rather than gain by producing only for myself, and then it is so agreeable to work for him."

As the man considered with reference to his art is the principal subject of the rest of the book, an endeavour has been made in this chapter to keep in the foreground the man amid circumstances common to each and all. But, above every other standard of estimation, the Rodin of the present stands out as the incomparable artist, prodigious in what he is doing no less than in what he has done. The greatest compliment one can pay him, the sincerest wish one can make for him, is that it might be possible for him in this last period of his life to withdraw himself more and more from the noise of the world's market, and, in his quiet retreat, to complete the realisation of his sculptural ideals.





VIEW OF A ROOM IN THE HOUSE AT MEUDON



## CHAPTER XIX

### CONCLUSION

COMPLETING the remarks which were made when beginning the preceding sketch of Rodin's life and labour, and which were intended to show the sculptor's relation to the past, an opinion at least may be offered, in conclusion and in summing up, as to the place he will be likely to occupy in the future of his art.

Notwithstanding the general recognition of his greatness, a recognition virtually accorded by his most adverse critics, his name might sink into oblivion with the lapse of years, unless in what he has done there is something that the future can utilise as well as the present. Men that aim only at immediate success and profits get no more than their deserts if posterity refuses to remember them.

Even a cursory perusal of the foregoing chapters must convince the candid reader that Rodin has never courted popular applause, that his productions have not been designed for the express purpose of gaining the greatest amount of praise and pelf in the shortest possible time. From his apprentice days he possessed a facility and elegance in modelling, a *chic* the French would say, which would have enabled him to speedily become a favourite among sculptors, had he laid himself out for it. But he cared little for this. The pleasure he sought was the pure pleasure of the artist in creating, or, as he prefers to say, in representing. If he could bring others to share in this pleasure, his own was doubtless increased, but that was not thought of until his principal object was attained.

# The Life of Rodin

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And this principal object was to give artistic materialisation to that which is eternally human, not to passions and thoughts personified, but to men and women feeling, suffering, moving, planning, dreaming, to plastically reveal a fleeting moment of their existence with its tragic or comic interest, just as the literary artist shows it through the medium of language. Forty years have been spent in such toil, and not in vain. Both in range and reality of execution, Rodin is at present unsurpassed, if not unsurpassable. Like Shakespeare's characters, his figures are all individuals, and yet possess typical signification that frees them from the narrow bounds of family or nationality and makes them severally capable of appealing to men of every age and clime. That the master has effected this through his own temperament and in his own way, in no wise detracts from the quality of his performance; it simply requires that they should be studied and comprehended.

When talking on his method, Rodin qualifies his naturalism merely as a faithful observation and following of nature and a reconstituting of her perfections in plastic shapes. If this were the entire explanation of his superiority over the academic style—and, as was pointed out in the introduction, the "rule of three" sort of beauty cannot support comparison with his bolder interpretation of form—a good many naturalists in art and literature that have no special merit might cover themselves with his mantle. In truth, Rodin's naturalism needs distinguishing by an epithet.

For any two men that look upon things outside them will have only the image which their developed organ of sight allows to each; and neither will see or interpret nature exactly in the same manner. This does not imply that there is no common study of phenomena which can bear a common name; but it does mean that the personal vision must be taken into account.

## Conclusion

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And Rodin's artistic perception of nature—which is the resultant of his original faculty and its cultivation—yields a naturalism which is something else than the mere observation and following of nature, however faithful. It is an active, imaginative selection of a very high order, constantly at work amidst the outer, material world, gliding everywhere between the atoms, discovering their finest relations, and recognising them in all their disguises on the three planes of visible life. Poetically its power might be described by what Shelley says of his Witch of Atlas :—

“ She all those human figures breathing there  
Beheld as living spirits—to her eyes  
The naked beauty of the soul lay bare ;  
And often, through a rude and worn disguise,  
She saw the inner form most bright and fair—  
And then—she had a charm of strange device,  
Which murmured on mute lips with tender tone,  
Could make that spirit mingle with her own.”

Characteristic of the man is the refusing to credit himself with more than the assiduous training of his eyes, ignoring for the nonce the mystery that lies behind the using of the senses, and the tendency in them to pass beyond their physical activities into others that are unanalyzable. How natural his naturalism is appears in the consistent striving after movement and structural expression, how imaginative it is appears from the equally consistent research of analogy between the rhythmic play of the human body and other forms of creation. When he carves his women like vases or like a flower, it is because he sees them as a vase or a flower, and because, too, he sees that the vase was and should be copied from the woman's body, and that the flower is potentially a human form. It is the presence of the imaginative element which spiritualises his naturalism, and preserves even its most sensuous representations from being gross



# The Life of Rodin

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and lowering. To those who have the terrified conviction that the nude body is necessarily obscene, half of Rodin's statues will seem gross, but the grossness is certainly in the conception of the beholder, and not in the statue. Whenever the sculptor has studied a movement of the body, he has always sought the meaning and cause of it as the best aids in representing it. Even the swelling of a muscle he finds cannot be properly translated plastically unless it is correlated to the intention. Naturalism of the superficial order has never understood this, and its presentment has consequently been base and essentially untrue. It deals only in photography of a poor and indiscriminating order, and its details can never be more than fragments broken off from nature in such a manner as to leave them powerless to convey any true message to the mind. In practising what, for want of a better term, must be called spiritual naturalism in his sculpture, Rodin is once again in touch with the highest traditions of his art. The addition he has made to past acquisitions is the arduous and loving poring over the nature of his own epoch, the manifestation of old and familiar things in a new and original light.

Three accusations currently brought against the master's statuary are—that it lacks design, that it lacks ideal, that there is in it a too great obtrusion of detail. If requested to state what they understand by design and ideal, the accusers would fall out over the definition; and, what is more, they would differ in replying if asked to specify what rules or axioms the statuary violates. Rodin claims that his designs are all found in nature. For the objector, therefore, to prove his charge in this respect he must demonstrate either that the sculptor's designs are not found in nature, or that nature's designs are defective. The latter task and the former alike have so far remained unattempted. Instead, there is a large



VUE OF THE INTERIOR OF THE MUSEUM, WITH THE BALZAC STATUE



## Conclusion

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use of adjectives, mainly indicative of the critic's incapacity for more than strong language. If Rodin's principles were fairly studied and his design judged after, not before, such knowledge gained, the critic would perceive that design in statuary is what harmony is in music; he would recognise that Rodin has done in the one what Wagner has done in the other, and he would stand a chance of having quite a new domain of enjoyment opened to him.

As regards the ideal, the sculptor may plead guilty of being wanting in the kind that has no contact with human experience. On the other hand, the ideal that deals with the deep things of the soul is the inspiration of all his work. To talk of his lacking ideal in presence of the "St John," and the busts (not to insist on the love ideals of the "Romeo and Juliet" and the "Eternal Printemps"), is to utter nonsense.

The third accusation, when examples are quoted, seems scarcely less frivolous. In the "St John" the sculptor has been blamed for modelling feet deformed by boots; in the "Vieille Heaulmière" it is the ravages of time that he is condemned for representing with such exactness; in the "Penseur" the muscles are too bunchy. Other examples are similar to these. Some of the particular charges are altogether inexact statements of fact, and all of them may be reduced to a debatable question of taste. To those whom structural expression pleases more than the style of sculpture in which the body is represented pretty much as the pig's, when he is scalded and scraped after killing, the presence of no detail corresponding to the natural organisation of man is an obtrusive sight. That which is really obtrusive is the thought of the critic, giving undue prominence to the details he complains of. This thought acts as a microscope. It enables him to see one part in exaggerated size, and by the same reason it shuts out the rest.

# The Life of Rodin

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It is convenient for those who decry Rodin's talent to ignore the profound study he has made of every branch of his art. To explain what they esteem to be his errors, they suggest that he allows himself to be guided by a will-o'-the-wisp fantasy which leads him mostly astray. The facts of his life disprove this entirely. They show that his sculpture is based on inductive reasoning no less than on his intuitive perception, that he has built up a scientific theory through calculated experiments, and that these experiments, or rather their results, are recorded in his successive pieces of statuary. When, by collating and comparing these pieces, a complete history of the sculptor's development is obtained, it will be seen how valuable an inheritance remains for the future. It will be seen, too, that Rodin has never made a rash leap, a reckless cast of the dice. Even his most daring essays will appear to have been maturely meditated; and those who hastily proclaimed him mad will be forced to admit that there was infinite method in his madness. Let it be recollected that the "Man with the Broken Nose" is slightly anterior to the "Alsatian Girl's Head," similarly that the "St John" is a little before the "Hell Gate," that the "Bourgeois de Calais" and "Baiser" were in the studio together, that the "Morla Vicuña" follows the "Rochefort" bust with only a couple of years between, and that the "Balzac" is prior to the bust of "Falguière." Such comparisons convince the careful student that all through the sculptor's career there has been the same balanced mind, the same bold search for higher perfection, and a rhythmic progress and order quite the opposite of vagabond fantasy. If anything else is needed to render this conclusion irrefutable, it is the number of years spent over many of the works—a phenomenon in itself worthy of attention. In so doing, and in his way of doing it, Rodin is once more in agreement with nature, whose grand evolutions happen only after long periods



## Conclusion

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of gestation. Those who know him well can testify to there being neither vanity nor incapacity in his delays. They are proportional to the originality contained in the production, and are demands made upon his patience by the necessity of satisfying his own intuitive conception and his own criticism, in other words, his art and his science.

The finality of his science is, of course, a moot question. Indeed, he would be the last to claim infallibility for it. The doctrine he teaches, however, has the present merit of being elastic, even where it is most categoric. In proclaiming nature as the only right model, it leaves the artist perfectly free to represent what he sees himself, whereas academic training binds him down to represent what an artificial code says ought to be seen. And in affirming as it does in its latest phase that structural expression is superior to movement, it neither excludes the latter nor closes the door to any other element that may be discovered in the object. On the contrary, by making the expression depend on individual choice, by insisting that the artist is at every stage of his modelling, and with each of his models, face to face with a new problem, since the living body is essentially protean, and its plastic representation must catch, of the transformations, the one that suits the particular purpose, the master's doctrine is eminently favourable to growth in the sculptor's art; it creates no Rodinian school, but it shows how to go to school, how to learn. This quality in a doctrine gives it greatest vitality as well as greatest application. If special schools and styles of statuary are still to succeed one another in the future, they will none the less be obliged to take something from Rodin. Like Bacon, he has formulated a method; and thus, entering into what is produced, without his name being necessarily attached to it, his influence is sure to live.

His art, which, however modified by his doctrine, yet

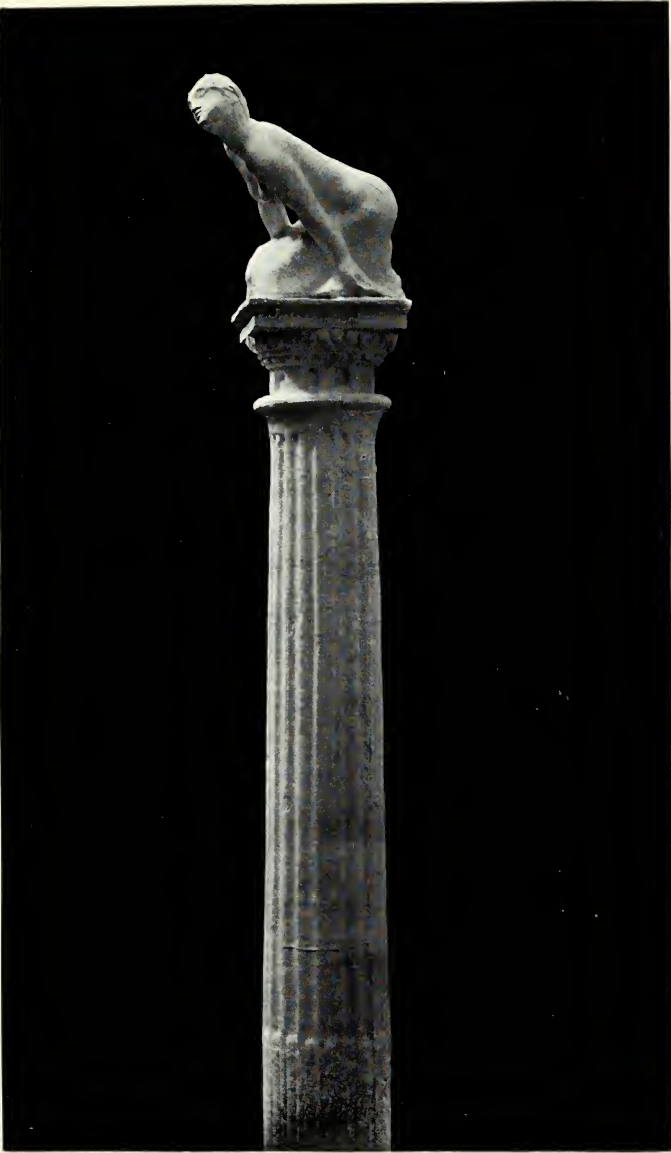
# The Life of Rodin

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dominates it, as emanating from his own soul, may be summed up in two qualities abundantly exemplified in the preceding pages of the book: (1) intense, characteristic life, and (2) minute fluidity of form.

Let any one try to recall the features, the bearing, the gesture of the generality of statues he has seen, and even been in the habit of seeing; and then, if he knows Rodin's statues, let him do the same with regard to them. He will be struck at once with the vagueness of image in the former, and the clearness of image in the latter. The reason is that in those the only illusion of life is in one or two silhouettes, whereas in these it is everywhere. An incident which came under the writer's notice will aptly illustrate the argument. A gentleman who already possessed a valuable piece of the sculptor's statuary, returned to the Meudon Museum to see what others were in process of execution. Suddenly, he noticed a small plaster vase just modelled, with a satyr bending over it and plunging his hand in to find something. The attitude of the satyr was full of impatient curiosity, his hairy legs and hoofs seemed quivering with excitement; and the visitor himself stirred and laughing at the vivacity thus portrayed, could not help giving a kick out with his own leg, so strong was the impression made upon him.

That which is experienced with the small things which the master models is equally experienced with the great, if indeed there can be said to be small and great except in physical size. Standing before any of his statues, one begins to think at once, not of the sculpture—that is thought of after—but of the personage, and to feel similar influences repellent or attractive, to formulate similar judgments, and to draw similar conclusions to those one would in presence of flesh and blood and mind. This is so whether the face is prominent or not. In the case of the satyr just mentioned, the face is practically



SIREN ON THE PILLAR  
(see page 299)

*To face page 296*



## Conclusion

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hidden, but the character proper to the creature is revealed in the rest of the body. Nor is there a falling off in intensity where face and figure bear an allegorical name. The presentment is still one that marks each with their own attributes, the plain and ugly so-called having a due place in the gallery and a due interpretation also.

If Rodin's quality of form is less appreciated than his quality of life, it is because artistic perception is limited more often to one point of view, this partly through lack of education and partly through the indifference common minds affect to what lies beyond the near horizon. And yet in each of his works there is a marvel of lines reproducing, if not with anatomic exactness, at least with a subjective semblance of it, the undulating grace of that which breathes and moves. The careless spectator may turn from such fine art, accustomed as he is to have his taste tickled with something more strange and less natural; the prejudiced one may turn away too, unable to learn, since he begins by condemning; on the other hand, the unbiased student who will cultivate its acquaintance cannot but gain in receptiveness. Like all art of high order, it will open his eyes to beauties in nature he had hitherto neglected.

And, definitively, in whatever way the master's work is regarded, one is struck by its strength — strength of sincerity, strength of elaboration, strength of sentiment. One feels there is a cohesion, a purpose in it, and a finish peculiar and proper to all its parts; by these it must survive. Moreover, out of the ferment of the present, a renaissance would seem to be preparing, more general and more thorough than the one which followed the Middle Ages. In this renaissance, art should play a rôle as important as science, persuading a return to simplicity and reinstating nature in the activity of life from which luxury and unhealthy refinement have dislodged her; then Rodin's sculpture would produce its full effect by what



# The Life of Rodin

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it can teach and inspire. But, before this and after, there is a title posterity will not forget to acknowledge and which will secure the master gratitude as long as his statuary exists, namely, the constant preoccupation of humanity in his figures, a constant sympathy with every type, and a constant research of kinship in them all.



THE MYSTERY OF THE SPRING  
(see page 299)

*To face page 298*



SUPPLEMENTARY LIST OF SOME IMPORTANT PIECES  
OF SCULPTURE NOT SPOKEN OF IN THE  
PRECEDING PAGES

"Psyche." Nude figure hiding under a mantle and peeping out as she stands.

"Echo." A nude female figure seated on a rock.

"The Mystery of the Spring." A naiad kneeling in a fountain-basin.

"The Death of Athens." Prostrate figure of a woman on some ruins.

"The Earth and the Moon." Two figures, the one hovering above the other, and enveloped with cloud.

"Jesus in the Garden of Olives." Two figures in high relief on a hollow background, an angel bringing consolation to Jesus.

"Cupid and the Maiden." The god of love suddenly appears, to the astonishment of the girl.

"Siren on the Pillar." Kneeling figure at the summit of an antique column.

"The Wave." A kneeling woman on the sea-shore, with her hands behind her head, wrings out the briny water from her heavy mass of hair.

"Girl confiding her secret to a Shade."

"Girl kissed by a Phantom."

"Girl between the Genii of Good and Evil."

"Pygmalion and Galatea."

"The Clouds." A group of two.

"Lost Illusions."

"The Poet's Dream."

"Bust of Miss Fairfax."

"Bust of Baron Constant d'Estournelles," etc., etc.

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